The INDEPENDENT

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INDEPENDENT CAMPAIGN US offers asylum lifeline to Afghan war hero as UK refuses to recognise his military service

THE MOMENT HE LIED

12.28pm 8 December 2021: Boris Johnson says all guidance was followed in Downing Street... after his closest aides warned he could make no such claim

A report expected to find Mr Johnson deliberately misled parliament is delayed after he makes a last-minute intervention

City centre horror as three killed in knife and van attacks

Two Nottingham students among dead as man steals vehicle and mows down pedestrians

HOLLY EVANS
IN NOTTINGHAM

A night out to celebrate the end of exams ended in horror when two students were attacked and killed along with an older man in Nottingham. The two 19-year-olds and a man in his fifties were fatally stabbed before the suspect allegedly stole the older victim's van and tried to run down three more people. A 31-year-old man was tasered and arrested on suspicion of murder. Witnesses spoke of "awful, blood-curdling screams" and seeing a man with a rucksack "grappling" with bystanders. A house in Ilkeston Road was last night under police guard after a search of nearby properties.

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Editorials

Abandoning an Afghan war hero is intolerably unjust

It is doubly shameful that an Afghan pilot who fought alongside British forces – and who must remain anonymous for safety reasons – has not had his contribution recognised by the British government, and that his case has had to be taken up by the United States. It is an intolerable injustice and an embarrassment, but *The Independent* will continue to campaign for him, and assemble a formidable coalition to fight for him, until ministers do the right thing – for as long as it takes.

Although this air force lieutenant did not serve directly in the British forces deployed to Afghanistan during the long campaign against the Taliban, he served alongside them, and flew missions planned by the British and the Americans, displaying the same bravery and risking his life in the same way as his allied comrades. Indeed, as an Afghan national, he and his family might well have been shown less mercy if captured.

In the heat of battle in Helmand province and elsewhere, the British authorities weren't zealous about drawing petty distinctions. His fight was our fight. Now, though, because of the narrow way in which the Arap (Afghan relocations and assistance policy) scheme has been drawn up, our Afghan hero is very much on his own. So is his family back home.

Fortunately he has friends with influence, as well as the kind of humanity, compassion and sense of honour that are in keeping with the best of British military tradition.

General Sir Richard Dannatt, for example, the former head of the British army, has been moved by this case, and by the way that a fellow fighter has been “cast off” by the British for the US to deal with. He calls the British government’s decision a “complete abrogation of our responsibilities and our decency”, saying: “Are we denying he fought against the Taliban? This is a most ungenerous decision which sits uncomfortably with common decency.”

Air Marshal Edward Stringer, commander of RAF air operations during the Afghan conflict, a man with an even more detailed knowledge of the role the allied air forces played together, adds that the government is making a “weaselling distinction” over the pilot’s war record and his Arap application.

There is cross-party political outrage, too. Former leader of the Conservative Party Sir Iain Duncan Smith has urged his colleagues to “do what is necessary to keep to the covenant that we protect his life as he helped to protect ours”. Stephen Kinnock, on the shadow defence team, also put it well: “Britain has a moral obligation to these Afghans, yet Operation Warm Welcome has become Operation Cold Shoulder.”

Today, in the humiliating light of the rejection of his claim, the pilot is in despair, and it is entirely the fault of British bureaucracy, which is taking the implementation of migration policy into callous territory. Like so many who arrived by irregular routes, the pilot is threatened with deportation to Rwanda.

Quite apart from his human rights, the UK and Nato need to consider how, in future conflicts, those at the sharp end in foreign wars will view fighting alongside perfidious Western allies. As the despairing pilot himself put it: “We made the biggest mistake in my life when we cooperated with the

American forces and British forces, and now we have to suffer the pain of being stateless, far from family, [in] humiliation and misery.”

This case highlights how dismal the treatment meted out to refugees outside the specific schemes dedicated to some Ukrainian, Hong Kong and Afghan citizens can be. There is still no settled and secure route to claim asylum in the UK. What’s more, there is no consideration given to the sacrifices and dangers endured by those, such as this Afghan pilot, who put their lives on the line alongside British soldiers, sailors, and air force personnel.

There ought to be some kind of “covenant”, as Sir Iain suggests, to recognise those who were ready to pay the ultimate price for freedom.

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BACK TO TOP ∧

Students among victims of deadly Nottingham attacks

Barnaby Webber has been named as one of those killed in the city yesterday (Facebook)

HOLLY EVANS
IN NOTTINGHAM

A night out to celebrate the end of exams ended in horror in the early hours of yesterday morning when two students were among three victims of a knife and van attack on the streets of

Nottingham. The 19-year-olds, along with a man in his fifties, were stabbed to death before the attacker allegedly stole the older victim's van and attempted to run over three more people, police said.

Police said a 31-year-old man was tasered and arrested on suspicion of murder following the pre-dawn rampage, and that he remains in custody. One of the victims was named Barnaby Webber, 19, a talented cricket player. He was killed alongside another 19-year-old in a 4am stabbing outside Mario's takeaway on Ilkeston Road. Both studied at the University of Nottingham.

The older victim was found dead on Magdala Road, a short distance across the city. Chief Constable Kate Meynell of Nottinghamshire Police said it was believed his van had been stolen by the suspect before being driven into three further victims on Milton Road near the Theatre Royal in the city centre. One man remains in critical condition while two others suffered minor injuries.

Candles are lit for those killed in yesterday's attacks (PA)

Witnesses spoke of hearing "awful, blood-curdling screams" and seeing a suspect wearing a hood and carrying a rucksack "grappling" with bystanders. Students spoke of their shock and confusion at the dramatic events, which occurred just before many were due to return home for the summer holidays.

Flowers laid at a vigil for the victims of the attack (Getty)

One 20-year-old told *The Independent* that the victims were first-year students walking home after a night out. “My friend knows the boy who died, he called me this morning. Both he and the girl were freshers walking back from a nightclub. It was the end of exams and there was a day festival at Binks Yard. Loads of people then went to Pryzm nightclub afterwards, it was really busy. Apparently, the boy and girl were walking home. This morning everyone was texting and calling each other to see if everyone was OK.”

Several students spoke of Barnaby’s talent at playing cricket. At a 5pm vigil at St Peter’s Church, dozens came to pay their respects, with a large group of boys consoling one another. Candles were lit at the service, which was attended mainly by students from the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University.

Police forensics officers on Ilkeston Road, Nottingham (PA)

Nottingham University student union confirmed that it had cancelled its Grad Ball, which had been due to take place last night.

Throughout the day, in intense summer heat, police officers were seen carrying out a painstaking search of the separate crime scenes, removing manhole and drain covers. A van parked on Bentinck Road became a focus of the investigation, while a Seat Leon was also removed, although it is unclear if the car was in any way linked to the attack.

At 1pm, armed police carried out a raid on a property just yards from where the victims were killed on Ilkeston Road. Footage showed a group of officers breaking down the door before carrying out a 10-minute search, with no further arrests made. Public transport across Nottingham was affected throughout the day, with a number of roads closed and the tram network disrupted.

Students in Nottingham console one another following news of the attack (Getty)

Nottinghamshire Police said they are keeping an “open mind” in relation to the attacks and are currently working alongside counterterrorism officers.

Home secretary Suella Braverman said: “We need to allow the police the time and the space to carry out all of their operational activity to determine the motive. It’s right that Nottinghamshire Police are working with Counter Terrorism Policing. But it’s also fair to say that everybody and all professionals on the frontline are keeping an open mind as to what the precise motive might have been.”

The University of Nottingham said: “It is with great sadness that we confirm the sudden and unexpected death of two of our students following a major incident in Nottingham city centre overnight. We are shocked and devastated by the news and our thoughts are with those affected, their families and friends. We know this is likely to cause distress for staff and students in our community.”

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BACK TO TOP ^

The 12 words that sparked a prime minister's downfall

Boris Johnson in the Commons during PMQs on 8 December 2021 (UK parliament/AFP/Getty)

ARCHIE MITCHELL
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

They were the 12 words that ultimately brought down a prime minister and if Boris Johnson didn't know it then, he will almost certainly know it now.

At 12.28pm on Wednesday 8 December 2021, the then prime minister stood at the despatch box at Prime Minister's

Questions to answer a question from Labour MP Catherine West, eight days after the first reports of Downing Street gatherings emerged.

With a knowing smile, Ms West asked Mr Johnson to tell the house "whether there was a party in Downing Street on 13 November". He stood up calmly, placing his notes on the historic despatch box, telling her firmly, "No," before adding, "the guidance was followed and the rules were followed at all times".

But just a few hours earlier, two of Mr Johnson's top aides had urged him against making this very claim. Mr Johnson's former communications chief Jack Doyle and Martin Reynolds, his principal private secretary, are reported to have warned that any assertion that guidance and rules had been followed may not stand up to scrutiny.

In the 18 months since, this statement has pushed Mr Johnson not just out of office as prime minister but ultimately out of parliament altogether. First, investigations by the Metropolitan Police and Partygate investigator Sue Gray confirmed that, as well as gatherings on at least seven other dates, there had been a party on 13 November in No 10, in breach of Covid-19 restrictions. Mr Johnson, too, was handed a £50 penalty by police for his own lockdown breach, at his birthday bash in the Cabinet Room on 19 June 2020.

Now, more than a year since its inquiries began, the privileges committee is set to conclude that Mr Johnson's response to Ms West in parliament deliberately misled the House of Commons – breaching the MPs' Code of Conduct. Commons rules state MPs – and especially ministers – must not give inaccurate information to parliament, either deliberately or inadvertently.

Giving evidence to the committee, Mr Johnson insisted mid-pandemic gatherings in Downing Street were "essential" and stated he had been "misremembering" when claiming during Partygate that rules had been followed at all times. Mr Johnson also claimed to have been "relying on the advice of officials" when answering questions in parliament. Central to his defence was the claim that he had been given “repeated assurances” that the Covid rules and guidance had been followed by advisers.

But the committee was not convinced, with its findings set to recommend Mr Johnson be suspended from parliament for long enough to trigger a vote in the Commons on whether he should face a by-election in his Uxbridge and South Ruislip seat.

An early version of this report prompted his bombshell resignation on Friday, as Mr Johnson bids to avoid putting his fate in the hands of MPs or his constituents. A politician who built and burnished his image on his colourful metaphors, verbosity and command of the English language, Mr Johnson was ultimately undone by 12 simple words.

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BACK TO TOP ^

Allies of Johnson vow to reject Partygate findings

Defiant former PM says ‘let the world judge their nonsense’

Boris Johnson leaves his home in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Oxfordshire, yesterday (Reuters)

ADAM FORREST
KATE DEVLIN
ARCHIE MITCHELL

Boris Johnson has vowed to launch an unprecedented attack on a parliamentary inquiry into Partygate that is widely predicted to be so damning that it could finally end his hopes of a political comeback. Hours after it emerged that an eleventh-hour appeal by the former prime minister had delayed the publication of its findings, Mr Johnson said they should be released so that “the world” could judge the “nonsense”.

In a warning to MPs who conducted the investigation, including Tory MPs, he said: “The privileges committee should publish their report and let the world judge their nonsense. They have no excuse for delay. Their absurdly unfair rules do not even allow any criticism of their findings.” He added: “I have made my views clear to the committee in writing – and will do so more widely when they finally publish.”

The former prime minister sent a letter to parliament’s privileges committee – which carried out the investigation – at 11.57pm on Monday, containing “further representations” for it to consider. The committee said it would deal with Mr Johnson’s letter and “report promptly”, but the late-night intervention pushed back the widely anticipated report yet again.

The last-minute submission raised fresh questions over the former prime minister’s behaviour, coming as it did just days after Mr Johnson had branded the committee a “kangaroo court” not worth engaging with. He claimed to have been the victim of a “political hit job” and that he had “no formal ability to challenge anything they say”.

The findings, which follow a year-long investigation by the privileges committee into whether Mr Johnson deliberately or recklessly misled MPs over Partygate, are now expected to be published as soon as tomorrow. It is thought that the committee has concluded that Mr Johnson is guilty, and that, had he not resigned, he would have been issued with a suspension long enough to trigger a recall petition in his Uxbridge and South Ruislip constituency.

As tensions flared ahead of the publication of the report, Mr Johnson’s allies urged Tory MPs to revolt when it is presented to the Commons. It came as:

- It emerged that Mr Johnson was warned by one of his most senior officials not to claim that social distancing guidelines had been followed at Downing Street gatherings

- Former culture secretary Nadine Dorries claimed to have been “bullied” by No 10 after she failed to receive a peerage
- The official Covid inquiry was told that the government’s focus on Brexit “crowded out and prevented” the work that was needed to prepare for the next pandemic

The Conservative Democratic Organisation (CDO), a grassroots group of Mr Johnson’s staunchest supporters, warned the party’s MPs not to endorse the privileges committee’s findings or any recommended sanctions.

Former Tory MEP David Campbell Bannerman, chair of the CDO, encouraged Tory MPs to “show their deep misgivings” about the committee’s treatment of the former PM. “We would hope Conservative MPs will not endorse that behaviour and will support due process and the rule of law by voting against. The public will be watching,” he told *The Independent*.

And Claire Bullivant, the CDO’s chief executive, said: “Any MP who believes in democracy and fair play should vote against this sham. Any MP with an ounce of integrity must make clear their disapproval of the report.”

The inquiry was launched following a motion last April backed unanimously by MPs. Once the committee publishes its report, MPs will debate it and decide whether to accept or reject its findings. Sources close to the committee said MPs could avoid a spectacle by unanimously waving it through, but suggested that supporters of Mr Johnson may object – embroiling the party in a further day of turmoil.

And despite backers of the former PM agitating for a rebellion, a former minister said the majority of Tory MPs wanted to draw a line under the Johnson era, especially following the turmoil of the last few days, saying: “We are all just hoping that this abusive relationship is coming to an end.”

The conclusions of the report are expected to rest on an appearance by Mr Johnson at PMQs in December 2021, during which he claimed that “the guidance was followed and the rules were followed at all times” in Downing Street. The committee is said to believe that this constitutes evidence that he deliberately misled parliament, having been warned by an aide earlier that day to not “argue that all guidance had been followed at all times”.

As he dramatically resigned as an MP last Friday, Mr Johnson used his 1,000-word exit statement to leave the door open for a return to Westminster. In a furious outburst, in which he attacked the committee and Rishi Sunak, Mr Johnson said he was leaving parliament “for now”.

The days since then have been rife with speculation about whether he could try to stand in a different seat at the next general election, with ally Jacob Rees-Mogg, who was honoured in Mr Johnson’s resignation list, claiming the former PM could “easily get back into parliament at the next election” – which would mean a return next year.

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BACK TO TOP ∧

Johnson knew ‘months ago’ Dorries peerage was a no-go

The information is thought to have been relayed to Boris Johnson by the government’s Cabinet Office in February (PA)

KATE DEVLIN

POLITICS AND WHITEHALL EDITOR

Boris Johnson was told his attempt to award a peerage to Nadine Dorries had been rejected as long ago as February, senior government sources have made clear.

The former prime minister and his close political ally stunned Westminster when they announced they were quitting as MPs on Friday, triggering by-elections the Conservatives, currently struggling in the polls, could lose.

They are now both locked in a public spat with Rishi Sunak over her peerage, amid claims Mr Johnson did not know until recently some of his nominations had been omitted.

Ms Dorries has accused the prime minister of “duplicitously and cruelly” blocking her appointment and claimed that information needed for her to pass the vetting process was held back. She has also said she discovered her name was not on the list half an hour before it was published. But the government disputed her claims.

It is understood that Mr Johnson was told she was not on the list of approved nominations as early as February. That was when the prime minister was informed who had been successfully vetted by the House of Lords Appointments Commission (Holac).

The information is thought to have been relayed to Mr Johnson by the government’s Cabinet Office. The update came weeks before the two men discussed the list when they met earlier this month – and well before Ms Dorries says she was informed.

On Monday the growing tensions over the peerages row spilled over as Mr Sunak publicly said his one-time ally had asked him to “do something I wasn't prepared to do”. The prime minister suggested Mr Johnson wanted him to ignore the Holac recommendations.

But Mr Johnson’s camp accused the PM of having “secretly blocked” peerages, including that of Ms Dorries and other loyalists. In an extraordinary statement, Mr Johnson hit out at his successor saying: “Rishi Sunak is talking rubbish. To honour these peerages it was not necessary to overrule Holac – but simply to ask them to renew their vetting, which was a mere formality.”

The Cabinet Office dismissed the attack, saying: “Holac did not support the nominations of the MPs put forward by the former prime minister. It is unprecedented for a sitting prime minister to invite Holac to reconsider the vetting of individual nominees on a former prime minister's resignation list. It is, therefore, not a formality.”

Downing Street said it would have been inappropriate for either No 10 or the Cabinet Office to contact individuals going through the vetting process directly.

“In line with the longstanding custom, the prime minister forwards the list unaltered following vetting by Holac,” the prime minister's official spokesman said. “Obviously, it is not for No 10 or the Cabinet Office to be in contact with individuals going through the Holac process – again, that would not be appropriate.”

Mr Sunak also hit back at a claim Ms Dorries that a “class ceiling” blocked her elevation to the Lords. She branded Mr Sunak and his close aide James Forsyth as “privileged posh boys”.

Asked if Mr Sunak thought only posh boys should go to the Lords, the prime minister’s official spokesperson replied: “No.”

As the Tory infighting continued for a fifth consecutive day, Sir Keir Starmer accused Boris Johnson of throwing a “political tantrum”. The Labour leader described the situation as “really unprecedented” and said parties “usually fight like this when they are out of office”.

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BACK TO TOP ^

Frankly my dear Nadine, Boris never gave a damn

Under his thumb: Dorries is one of Johnson’s most devoted and deluded supporters (Getty)

TOM PECK

There could be no more perfect finale to the most tedious box set drama of all time than a week-long row about a peerage for Nadine Dorries.

Of course, Johnson’s most recent and surely now final downfall doesn’t actually have anything at all to do with Nadine Dorries. It’s to do with him lying to the House of Commons. The row about Nadine Dorries is an entirely separate row, which is not about him lying to the Commons but lying to Nadine Dorries, which she is sadly if not tragically incapable of working out.

Eventually, everybody works out that Boris Johnson never gave a toss about them, but Dorries looks likely to be the exception that proves the rule. For her, it seems the penny will never begin its descent. No, Dorries would sooner write columns for the *Daily Mail* about the "sinister forces" that kept her, a working-class girl from Liverpool, from joining the House of Lords, than see that if someone isn't telling the truth, there really is an overwhelmingly likely candidate.

In some ways, it's a shame that she's so very wrong. If only there were sinister forces preventing working-class women from being elevated to the peerage, then you and I wouldn't yet again be paying the government's legal costs as it tries to get back some of the £122m it gave to Baroness Michelle Mone, originally of Glasgow but now of Mayfair, for a load of PPE that she never actually had.

But it's still pleasing to see some of the best characters finally weaved into the central plot line. For quite a while, the likes of Dorries and Jacob Rees-Mogg were crucial to the dramatic spectacle but not the narrative.

One of the most crucial causes of Johnson having been rendered so unfathomably ridiculous is that only the already ridiculous were willing to defend him. When a prime minister first denies that any illegal parties took place, then has to admit they did happen but he didn't know about them, then has to admit that he didn't know about them but he was in fact at them, any even vaguely sane Tory MP just puts their phone on silent, and ignores the calls from the TV news channels.

> **The only thing left to blame it on is a made-up word, and the only people left to do the blaming are the very, very stupidest of them all**

It has been possible, for a very long time now, to precisely measure the depth of the excrement in which Johnson has buried himself by exactly who has sprinted to the TV studios to defend him, armed only with a shovel, with which to make the hole ever deeper.

When merely entirely bang to rights, you might hear from someone like James Cleverly. When an outrage has occurred, enter Dorries, or Rees-Mogg. An atrocity – that's when you can be sure you'll be hearing from Michael Fabricant or, very occasionally, Christopher Chope. As his star not so much waned as exploded, in the privileges committee investigation, and finally its report, which will be published just as soon as its members get their hands on a new printer cartridge, his always entirely ridiculous defenders were left only with the most ridiculous of defences.

And so here he is, left with the likes of Jake Berry, Nadine Dorries, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Andrea Jenkyns, blaming the downfall of the latest Etonian prime minister first on "the establishment" and more recently on "the blob". The only thing left to blame it on is a made-up word, and the only people left to do the blaming are the very, very stupidest of them all.

The fact that at least some of them were promised peerages for their efforts, and the even more recent fact that those peerages will not be forthcoming, because Johnson very obviously lied to them about the process involved and they trusted him enough not to bother checking until it was too late, is a frankly ingenious way to weave it all together in time for the credits to roll. To bring absolutely everything back to the fundamental truth. That the demise of Boris Johnson is, once again, about absolutely nothing but his own towering deficiencies. That no one else is to blame.

But also – and this really is the masterstroke – it is an ending that contains within it more than the faint possibility of another series. If Nadine Dorries is stupid enough to believe him, and the *Daily Mail* thinks its readers are stupid enough to believe her, then the flame of eternal bullshit has not been extinguished.

Don't be naive enough to think we couldn't all get burned again.

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

What will be the Boris by-election fallout for Tories?

Sean O'Grady examines the resignation repercussions

POLLING
STATION

After the local elections in May, this will be the first real-world test of voter sentiment (PA)

The resignation of Boris Johnson and two of his close allies, Nadine Dorries and Nigel Adams, as MPs means there will be three by-elections as a direct result of Johnson's decision to evade the findings of the Commons privileges committee.

A fourth by-election may well occur in Rutherglen and Hamilton West. That seat is held by the former SNP politician Margaret Ferrier. She was ordered to be suspended from the House after her conviction for breaking Covid regulations, and a recall petition has been opened in her seat. If 10 per cent of the constituents sign up, then there will be a by-election. Ferrier may contest it, but not as an official SNP candidate.

After the local elections in May, these by-elections will be the first real-world test of voter sentiment, and should provide an interesting insight into the matter of whether tactical voting is likely to play a significant role in the next general election.

There'll also be some interest in how the minor parties, such as the Greens and Reform UK, perform. The four seats are a reasonably good mix, and a psephological feast awaits.

When will the by-elections be?

In short, probably on 20 or 27 July. Given that Rishi Sunak probably wants to get these unnecessary distractions out of the way as soon as possible, the writs for the three contests in England will be moved by the government chief whip in the Commons imminently. The speaker will then issue a warrant to the clerk of the crown, who in turn sends the writ to the returning officer.

The by-election timeframe is between 21 and 27 working days from the issuing of the writ. Some of the parties in some of the seats have already chosen candidates, and there has already been early campaigning activity.

Which is the most likely one for Labour to win?

Rutherglen and Hamilton West, for three reasons: first, because it is the most marginal in any case, with Scottish Labour the clear challengers; second, because the SNP, which took the seat from Labour in 2019, is especially weak at the moment; and third, because it is historically a Labour stronghold.

Before the SNP tsunami of 2015, Rutherglen and its predecessor constituencies had been reliably Labour for decades – David Hardie, the brother of Keir, was once the MP. Since 2015, it's been nip and tuck between Labour and the SNP.

If Anas Sarwar's candidate can't grab an easy gain for Labour here, at a time when the SNP is suffering the depth of scandal that has seen its former leader arrested, then Labour may as well write Scotland off. From a purely Scottish point of view, Alex Salmond and his Alba Party will be seeking to exploit the current disarray in the SNP.

If Anas Sarwar's candidate can't grab an easy gain in Rutherglen, Labour might as well write Scotland off (PA)

Aside from that, Uxbridge and South Ruislip is the prime Labour target, and will probably see the biggest effort. A new candidate, Danny Beales, has been chosen to fight Johnson's putative successor. Labour needs a swing of about 8 per cent to win, and, factoring in some Lib Dem and Green tactical voting, it'll be a serious disappointment for Keir Starmer if he fails to prevail in this slice of suburbia.

Heathrow airport is a perennial complicating factor locally, and the arrival of fringe candidates such as Count Binface and Lawrence Fox should liven things up. Keen students of the latest Johnson psychodrama will be keen to see if Johnson turns up for some valedictory campaigning, and if he runs into Sunak on the mean streets (though PMs traditionally don't risk turning up to by-elections).

Intriguingly, a constituency poll by Michael Ashcroft indicated that Johnson would have won a by-election here, but that's less relevant now.

Mid Bedfordshire is nominally a target for Labour, as runner up, and the party says it'll be going for it. But recent by-election experience in rural English seats such as Tiverton and North Shropshire suggests that the Liberal Democrats have more potential to score an upset.

Is there any chance the Tories will hold at least one of them?

Yes. Nigel Adams's former seat of Selby and Ainsty in North Yorkshire is one of the safest in the country, and the Tory majority (not vote) is a colossal 35 per cent. Adams (on 60 per cent) beat his Labour opponent by two to one, with the Lib Dems trailing on 9 per cent.

Even in a very bad year, the Tories ought to be able to cling on here in this mostly prosperous, Brexity rural seat not far from Sunak's own in Richmond. It's certainly unclear which of the main opposition parties would have the best chance of a sensation. If the Tories do contrive to lose it, then it's bad news indeed.

What about tactical voting?

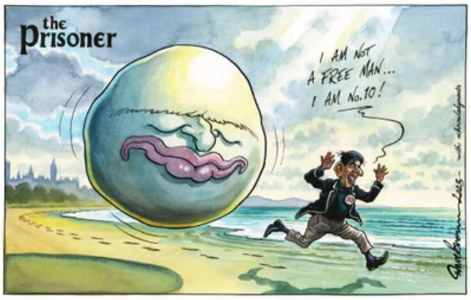
This is going to feature to a degree in all the seats – even in Rutherglen, where pro-union Tories and Liberal Democrats will be tempted to lend their support to Labour. It'll be most potent in Mid Bedfordshire, however, if there are clear early signs that the Lib Dems are able to establish themselves as the principal challengers.

They'll be buoyed up by the last local elections in May, when they and the independents made strong gains on Central Bedfordshire Council, with Labour and the Greens slipping back.

What will this do for the government's chances of getting a grip on the political agenda?

Tory party managers will hope that holding the elections in the dog days of July will minimise their news impact, and that the fuss will be over by the time parliament returns in the autumn and the Tory conference kicks off in October. But nervous Tory MPs and candidates are unlikely to be much reassured by what promises to be a night of the psephological long knives.

Tory chair Greg Hands will need to do a better job of massaging expectations than he did at the locals.


the Prisoner
I AM NOT A FREE MAN... I AM No.10!

Tory wheels are coming off as Starmer takes pole position

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BACK TO TOP ^

News/ Exclusive

US offers lifeline to Afghan war hero facing deportation

Humiliation for Britain as America considers the case of a pilot rejected by the Arap scheme (Getty/The Independent)

HOLLY BANCROFT
ANDREW FEINBERG
ADAM FORREST

The US is formally investigating whether to give safe haven to the Afghan pilot UK officials are threatening to deport to

Rwanda, sparking fury from top politicians and military figures who called it "shameful" that Britain should turn its back on the war hero. The former air force lieutenant, who flew multiple combat missions alongside coalition forces, has been living in limbo for months after coming to the UK on a small boat while his wife and child hide from the Taliban in Afghanistan.

There was shock at defence secretary Ben Wallace's refusal to intervene after the pilot's application to the UK's Afghan refugee scheme was rejected this week – a decision that left him facing the prospect of a one-way flight to Rwanda. While British officials have refused to intervene to halt the Home Office deportation threat, the US Department of State is now considering the pilot and his family's asylum application after *The Independent* first raised his case.

General Sir Richard Dannatt, the former head of the British army, said the fact that the pilot had been "cast off" by the British for the US to handle was "a complete abrogation of our responsibilities and our decency". Air Marshal Edward Stringer, commander of RAF air operations during the Afghan conflict, said the UK government was making a "weaselling distinction" over the pilot's war record.

Former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith said that for Britain to "turn its back on a pilot" and fail to "do what is necessary to keep to the covenant that we protect his life as he helped to protect ours" is "shameful". Sir Iain told *The Independent*: "Without heroes like this pilot, who is now seeking our help to stay here, we would not be able to fight causes which matter to democratic governments who fight for freedom."

He added: "We were allies and comrades in arms to those who helped the coalition, and now they themselves and their families are at risk from the Taliban. We have failed our pledge we gave to stand by them. To see America stand in for us and do the decent thing is galling and shameful."

The Afghan pilot has called on Rishi Sunak to stop him from being deported (Holly Bancroft)

Labour said Rishi Sunak's government appeared to be applying "Operation Cold Shoulder" to Afghan heroes, describing the intervention by the US as "deeply embarrassing".

The airman, who flew more than 30 sorties planned by British and US commanders against terrorist threats, was described as a "true patriot to his nation" by his US supervisor. But the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has rejected his application to stay in the UK under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy (Arap), which is aimed at getting those who helped British forces out of Afghanistan.

The government said it did not accept that his role had "resulted in a high and imminent risk of a threat to [his] life". The MoD also said it did not accept that Britain's operations in

Afghanistan would have been "materially less efficient or materially less successful" without his role. Although category 4 of the Arap scheme – thought to be the pilot's best chance of staying in the UK – is aimed at those "closely supporting and assisting" British forces, officials deemed him ineligible.

Senior military figures are disappointed that Mr Wallace – rumoured to be angling for the job of Nato secretary general – has not rushed to the aid of the Afghan pilot, who helped coalition forces against the Taliban.

"This is a very disappointing decision, justified on very narrow grounds," Lord Dannatt told *The Independent*. "Are we denying he fought against the Taliban? This is a most ungenerous decision which sits uncomfortably with common decency. He came to this country, trusting in the decency of the British, by the only means available to him, and now seems doomed to be deported to Rwanda. To cast him off as America's problem is a complete abrogation of our responsibilities and our decency."

Lord Dannatt has backed the Afghan pilot's case, saying the MoD's decision is 'disappointing' (AFP/Getty)

Air Marshal Stringer said: "Whether we had a de jure contract with these Afghan servicemen or not seems a weaselling distinction on which to fall back. The de facto contract was that we encouraged Afghans to join the security services and fight alongside us to achieve our ends, putting themselves at risk from regressive and dangerous forces such as the Taliban."

He added: "When we removed the cover we had promised them, we left them dreadfully exposed. What weight does our moral authority carry when we weasel out of our obligations; and why should we expect people to trust us in future?"

Dozens of military chiefs, politicians and celebrities have backed *The Independent*'s call to allow the pilot and other Afghan veterans who helped coalition forces to be given safe refuge.

After serving alongside coalition forces, the pilot received two personal recommendations that referred to his strength of character and the role he had played in fighting the Taliban in the years leading up to the fall of Kabul in August 2021. He has now been accepted onto the US's P1 resettlement scheme, for which applicants have to be personally approved by a US official. There is no guarantee that he will be offered asylum, and the process can take years, but he has entered the assessment stage.

Currently living in Home Office accommodation in the UK, the pilot is despairing at his situation and said that the decision he made to risk his life for the coalition is his biggest regret. "We made the biggest mistake in my life when we cooperated with the American forces and British forces, and now we have to suffer the pain of being stateless, far from family, [in] humiliation and misery," he said. He is also growing increasingly worried for the safety of his family, as he waits to hear the outcome of a separate asylum application to the Home Office.

Officials at home secretary Suella Braverman's department warned the airman that he could be sent to Rwanda because his Channel journey is deemed to have been illegal. He has been given 90 days to appeal the decision to turn him down for the Arap scheme.

The pilot flew combat missions organised by coalition forces in Afghanistan (The Independent)

A number of Afghans who helped American forces before the US withdrew from Afghanistan, including the pilot, were referred to the scheme by their US supervisors directly after the fall of Kabul. But aside from being asked to fill out a form with more details, the pilot heard nothing more from the state department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

However, last month, after being approached by *The Independent*, the White House said it would investigate his case, and it has been confirmed to be in the system.

During his trip to Washington last week, Mr Sunak ignored questions about the pilot from *The Independent* as he arrived at the White House to meet US president Joe Biden. He also declined to address a similar question at the end of a joint press conference with Mr Biden later that day.

Labour's shadow immigration minister Stephen Kinnock said: "Britain has a moral obligation to these Afghans, yet Operation Warm Welcome has become Operation Cold Shoulder. The fact that the British government is trying to send a loyal-to-Britain Afghan pilot to Rwanda is a tragedy in itself, while the US government's intervention is deeply embarrassing evidence of just how far the UK's international reputation is being tarnished by the shameful behaviour of this callous and chaotic Conservative government."

Armed forces minister James Heappey has said that members of the Afghan forces, such as the pilot, do not qualify “in principle” for the MoD’s scheme, which was initially set up to help Afghans who were employed by the British army.

A spokesperson for the government said it remained committed to protecting vulnerable and at-risk people fleeing Afghanistan, and so far has brought around 24,500 people to the UK. “We continue to work with like-minded partners and countries neighbouring Afghanistan on resettlement issues, and to support safe passage for eligible Afghans,” the spokesperson said.

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BACK TO TOP ∧

Mortgage pain as rates rise to highest since Truss crisis

The number of mortgage products available continues to fall at the same time (Getty)

JONATHAN KANENGONI

Buyers are facing further mortgage turmoil as UK markets react to signs of spiralling inflation, which could cause a knock-on effect for renters. Interest rates are expected to rise to 6 per cent after wages spiked at a record pace in the latest official figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Data showed that wages in the UK are rising quicker than expected, mounting pressure on the Bank of England (BoE) to respond next week. Yields on short-term government bonds, used to set customer borrowing rates by lenders, have spiked even higher than during Liz Truss' disastrous mini-Budget.

ONS figures released yesterday show UK wages grew at their fastest pace on record, excluding the pandemic period, in the three months to April this year – at a clip of 7.2 per cent, following a rise in the national minimum wage. Much speculation surrounds the response of the Monetary Policy Committee, with suggestions they may opt for a 0.5 percentage increase on the existing rate of 4.5 per cent.

Governor Andrew Bailey told peers in an assessment of the situation: "As I'm afraid [yesterday] morning's numbers illustrated, we've got a very tight labour market in this country."

Ministers admitted the rising rates were a cause for concern but added that inflation was the "number one enemy", and essential to tackle. While rates continue to increase, the number of mortgage products available continues to fall, with many lenders pulling the country's biggest banks and building societies have been pulling loans.

Santander became the latest major mortgage lender to announce a temporary pause on some applications (PA)

Santander became one of the latest lenders to temporarily pull mortgage deals for new lenders, as a BoE policymaker warned interest rate rises "cannot be ruled out". Major bank HSBC and Nationwide Building Society also pulled loans, though the former now selling mortgages through brokers, though rates have increased by 0.10 to 0.15 percentage points.

“Lenders should be prepared to help out mortgage holders who get into financial difficulties due to rising rates,” Downing Street has said. The situation is set to cause more misery for Britons, already facing a cost of living crisis fuelled by rising inflation.

Renters are also expected to bear the brunt of rising rates, with concerns that dwindling profits could see a mass departure of landlords and properties from the market.

The prime minister said the “single biggest thing” the government could do was work with the Bank of England to bring down inflation. “There [does] remain a large range of mortgage deals available to the public, but we know this current situation may be concerning for some homeowners and mortgage holders.

“The chancellor has made clear his expectation that lenders should live up to their responsibilities and support any mortgage borrowers who are finding it tough right now. For our part, alongside the work on inflation, we are providing £3,300 per household to help with rising costs.”

Asked what sort of help could be offered to struggling households, the spokesperson said “pricing and availability of mortgage products is a commercial decision for lenders” but “we do encourage them to help people who are struggling right now, as the government is doing on its part”.

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

Brexit 'crowded out' plans for pandemic, inquiry told

Lawyer tells hearing the threat of 'no deal' drained Whitehall of 'resources and capacity' (EPA)

ADAM FORREST
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

The government's focus on Brexit "crowded out and prevented" the work that was needed to prepare for the next pandemic, the lead lawyer to the Covid-19 inquiry has said. Hugo Keith KC told the inquiry that work arising from the threat of a no-deal exit from the EU under Boris Johnson may have drained "the resources and capacity” that were needed for pandemic planning.

The top lawyer told the chair of the inquiry, Baroness Hallett, that a lot of planning had gone into the “severe consequences of a no-deal exit on food and medicine supplies, travel and transport”. He said it was “clear that such planning, from 2018 onwards, crowded out and prevented some or perhaps a majority of the improvements that central government itself understood were required to be made to resilience planning and preparedness”.

The Operation Yellowhammer document – published by the government in 2019 – set out a series of “reasonable worst-case assumptions” about what would happen if the UK did not reach a deal with the EU. Mr Johnson had ordered the government to prepare for the “strong possibility” of a no-deal Brexit as talks stalled, saying he could leave Britain “locked in the EU’s orbit”. But the Operation Yellowhammer document suggested there would be real risks of a rise in public disorder, higher food prices and reduced medical supplies.

Mr Keith told the inquiry: “Did the attention therefore paid to the risks of a no-deal exit … drain the resources and capacity that should have been continuing the fight against the next pandemic, that should have been utilised in preparing the United Kingdom for civil emergency? Or did all that generic and operational planning in fact lead to people being better trained and well marshalled – and, in fact, better prepared to deal with Covid – and also to the existence of improved trade, medicine and supply links?”

Mr Keith added: “The evidence so far … we very much fear that it was the former.”

Inquiry hears Boris Johnson told ministers to prepare for a no-deal Brexit (PA)

The lead counsel said the UK may not have been "very well prepared at all" to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, as public hearings began yesterday. Mr Keith said that "very little thought" was given to the impact lockdowns could have on the country.

The inquiry heard from bereaved families in a series of moving video interviews, which included harrowing stories of people dying alone from Covid. Lady Hallett vowed that those who suffered in the pandemic will "always be at the heart of the inquiry". Evidence is likely to show a lack of responsibility in government, and a state of "chaos" which resulted in a slow reaction to a pandemic where "lost time is measured in lost lives", the inquiry has been told by representatives of the bereaved.

Pete Weatherby KC, of Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK, said there had been "little or no ministerial leadership, and the chaos of committees, which led to poor planning and ultimately a reactive rather than proactive response to the virus".

The first module – investigating the country's preparedness for the crisis – will include evidence on "any impact arising from the UK's departure from the European Union". The inquiry team will also scrutinise the vaccine programme under module four, examining whether Britain's vaccines response was more effective as a result of the UK being outside the EU.

Mr Johnson and Tory ministers have argued that Brexit allowed the UK to chart its own course with the vaccines, both when it came to licensing and also when buying up doses. While the UK's vaccine rollout was faster than that of the EU, Kate Bingham, the former head of the government's taskforce, said that the speedy approval had "nothing to do with Brexit".

Former PM David Cameron and former chancellor George Osborne are expected to appear at an inquiry hearing next week. The TUC has said that their austerity cuts left the NHS and the social care sector "dangerously understaffed". Meanwhile, care minister Helen Whately declined to back former health secretary Matt Hancock's claim that the government threw a "protective ring around care homes" at the height of the pandemic.

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

‘I’ve got a baby son who will never know his grandfather’

As the Covid inquiry begins, **Lucy Skoulding** speaks to the families who fear being ‘sidelined’ in their bid for justice

if you think i'm
cute, you should
see my daughter

Jo Goodman lost her father Stuart, 72, at the start of the pandemic (Supplied)

A daughter whose father received his shielding letter nine days after he died from Covid has raised fears that bereaved families will be left out of the public inquiry into the government's handling of the pandemic.

The Covid inquiry began yesterday at Dorland House in London – over three years after the pandemic started in 2020. The inquiry found that "very little thought" was given to the consequences of locking down the country before the pandemic began, and there was a failure to consider the "potentially massive impact” such drastic action might have on life in the UK.

The Covid inquiry’s lead counsel, Hugo Keith KC, also said the probe had found that there was a lack of forethought regarding some of the major areas of life affected by the outbreak of coronavirus.

Jo Goodman, co-founder of Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK, lost her “incredibly warm” and “supportive” father at the start of the pandemic. He contracted Covid the week before the UK went into lockdown, and died soon after on 2 April 2020.

Stuart Goodman, a retired press photographer, was 72 when he died from Covid. It left Jo and her family heartbroken because they felt his death “didn’t need to happen”.

ONE SATURDAY
IN 82 ON
BROADWAY MARKET
Stuart Goodman

‘One-off’: Stuart Goodman was a retired press photographer working on a book when he died of Covid (Supplied)

Ms Goodman told *The Independent*: “My dad was a one-off – you’d meet him once and remember him years later. He was a big character, incredibly warm and the most supportive father you could wish to have. It’s easy to write people off but he wasn’t sitting around waiting to die – he was about to publish a photography book. I’ve got a baby now who will never know his grandfather – nothing can bring him back or undo how that feels.”

Explaining what happened, Ms Goodman said her family believe Stuart may have picked Covid up when he went to a hospital appointment on 18 March and there were “no mitigations in place”.

She continued: “Sadly we knew he was very vulnerable due to his age and health conditions and he went downhill very quickly. I mainly felt it didn’t need to happen. We had done everything. Our family had put ourselves into lockdown and shielded. But my dad got his shielding letter nine days after he died. We did everything in our power to protect him but the state didn’t – he didn’t need to die.”

Ms Goodman co-founded Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK with Matt Fowler, who also lost his father to the virus. She contacted him after spotting a comment he made under an article in *The Independent* which featured Ms Goodman. She said they felt that bereaved families needed a voice and the idea for the inquiry was subsequently born.

The Covid bereaved display phots of their loved ones as they gather outside Dorland House in London yesterday (PA)

Ms Goodman continued: “We wanted to minimise the risk of people losing loved ones to this in the future. Preventing was our motivation. The initial phase of campaigning and demoralising because our grief was so fresh. People were joining the group on a daily basis and it felt like everyone was having similar experiences. It was heartbreaking because it felt like these losses could have been prevented. We felt a weight of responsibility to protect people who were yet to be bereaved.”

Ms Goodman added that then prime minister Boris Johnson and his government were saying they were “too busy” to meet the group. Speaking about the launch of the Covid inquiry, Ms Goodman said today is a “momentous” occasion but that she’s “quite concerned that bereaved families are being somewhat sidelined”.

A potential witness for module one of the inquiry, on resilience and preparedness, she was not called. Ms Goodman said: “By listening to stories from bereaved families there’s way of understanding what was happening in the rest of the country. A proportionate number of witnesses would help to reveal failings in the response.”

Aamer Anwar, a lawyer representing the Scottish Covid Bereaved group, said that listening to personal experiences from the crisis is vital in learning how to handle any future pandemics. He told *The Independent* there is “no one in the country” who wasn’t impacted by Covid but it’s like “people’s bodies were treated like toxic waste”.

Mr Anwar’s father, a care home resident, had dementia and didn’t understand what was happening in the country.

UK
Covid-19
Inquiry

Baroness Hallett is chairing the Covid inquiry (PA)

He said: “I know the agony and pain of watching someone with dementia not understanding what is happening and not being able to visit them, and meanwhile untested people were being allowed into care homes. It was shocking. People felt powerless.”

Mr Anwar said the families he speaks to want “answers and truth”. He added: “Today was very important. It’s a start. We realise the complexity of it but for families who have lost loved ones this is about finding truth and creating a legacy for the future”.

A number of the bereaved with whom Mr Anwar has worked shared their stories of loss at the press conference. Among them was Carolyn Murdoch, 67, who lost her father John Connelly to Covid in early 2020.

She said: “My dad went into a care home on the 27 of February 2020 where he contracted Covid-19 in April 2020 despite the government promising to throw a safety ring around them. He sadly passed away on the 23rd of April in Glasgow Royal Infirmary alone at the age of 104 as no one was allowed to be with him.

“Myself and the rest of the family have been left heartbroken by the circumstances of his death. We were unable to support or comfort each other as we grieved him. He was a kind, loving family man and was known affectionately as our ‘Legend’. I hope the inquiry’s findings ensure that the same mistakes don’t happen again.”

The Covid inquiry is expected to cost more than £100m.

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BACK TO TOP ^

AI could mark pupils' work and act as a 'personal tutor'

Ministers recognise the dangers but also want to 'harness AI's magic', says Baroness Barran (PA)

KATE DEVLIN

Artificial Intelligence "tutors" in schools could close the attainment gap between rich and poor students, an education minister has suggested. Baroness Barran, minister for the school system and student finance, said AI had the potential to cut teacher workloads and give pupils greater feedback on their work.

Writing exclusively in *The Independent*, she suggested it could "do more". She added: "Could AI help children with special needs and disabilities learn more intuitively? Could it ease a teacher's administrative burden by doing the heavy lifting on routine tasks like marking? Could it help reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged children by giving them a free 'personal tutor?'"

Ministers, she added, recognise the dangers involving AI but also want to "harness its magic". Her intervention comes just a week after an adviser to Rishi Sunak warned the technology could help produce deadly weapons that "kill humans" in just two years' time.

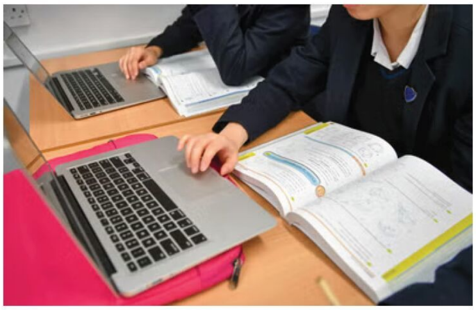
The education secretary, Gillian Keegan, will today say more work is needed to understand the risks AI could pose to schools, colleges and universities. Ministers want education leaders and technology experts to put forward ideas on how to use AI "in a safe and secure way" in education.

Guidance from the UK's major exam boards suggested that pupils should do coursework "in class under direct supervision" amid fears the rise of AI could prompt widespread cheating. In a speech to technology and education experts, Ms Keegan will say: "AI is going to transform the world around us and help grow the economy.

ChatGPT is a form of generative AI that can respond to questions in a human-like manner and understand the context of follow-up queries, much like in human conversations, as well as being able to compose essays if asked – sparking fears it could be used by students to complete assignments.

Last month, BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, called for AI to be part of teacher training courses to help staff understand how students are using AI.

Artificial intelligence could transform the way we teach



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BACK TO TOP ^

Mother and stepfather killed Alfie, 9, who suffered cold water 'dunking' torture

Alfie Steele had 50 injuries all over his body when he fatally collapsed in February 2021 (PA)

HOLLY EVANS

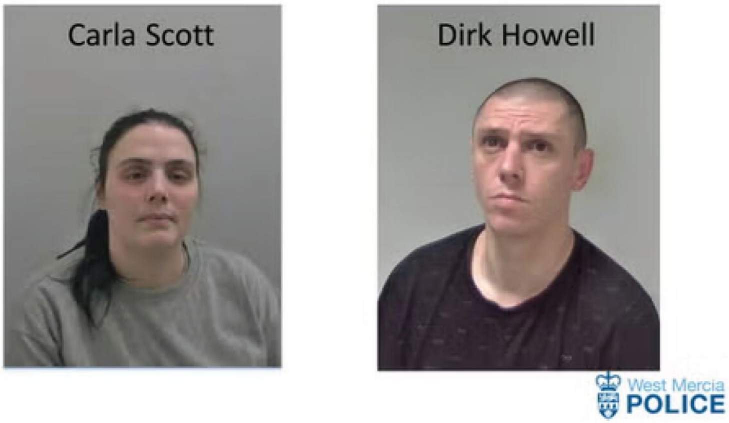
A mother and stepfather have been found guilty over the killing of her nine-year-old son at his home in Worcestershire. Carla Scott has been convicted at Coventry Crown Court of the manslaughter of Alfie Steele and her partner Dirk Howell has been convicted of murdering the youngster, who was repeatedly assaulted.

Alfie was repeatedly beaten and assaulted by Scott and Howell, and was put in a cold bath as a punishment prior to his death in February 2021, their trial heard. Both Scott and Howell had denied Alfie was "dunked" in the water as part of a "sinister" regime of correction at his mum's address in Droitwich.

Jurors at Coventry Crown Court heard that Alfie had 50 injuries all over his body, with only a handful likely to be attributed to normal childhood bumps and scrapes. Medical experts previously told the jury that seven of the injuries to his head and face were likely to have come from four different blows.

On the day of his death, Scott rang 999 at 2.24pm and told the call handler that "Alfie had fallen asleep in the bath". Howell was not at the house when officers arrived, with Scott later claiming to have found the boy "submerged" and that he had previously "hit his head".

Scott, 35, denied murdering her son and told her trial that she had not "belted" Alfie, while her partner claimed to have attempted CPR to revive the schoolboy. He also told jurors that he had not beaten the schoolboy nor attempted to stage a cover-up.



Mother Carla Scott and stepfather Dirk Howell have both been convicted (West Mercia Police)

Jurors at Coventry Crown Court took 10 hours and 13 minutes of deliberation to find 35-year-old Scott guilty of Alfie's manslaughter, returning a majority verdict of 11 to one yesterday. She was cleared of his murder. Howell, 41, was found guilty of Alfie’s murder by unanimous verdict. The judge, Mr Justice Wall, remanded both defendants into custody to be sentenced at 11am tomorrow.

Following the verdict, Alfie’s grandad, Paul Scott, paid tribute to his grandson. “Our precious grandson Alfie was a charming, funny and inquisitive young boy whose kindness and cheeky smile was enough to melt your heart. He had a unique personality that made him a treasure to be around, whether it was his comical phrases or his quirky dance moves, he knew how to make you laugh and cry joyous tears.

“It fills us with immense sadness that we will never be able to see that same cheeky smile again. Losing Alfie has left a massive void in our lives; to think that we will never be able to hug him and watch him grow into an accomplished young man causes much anguish. We miss him so much.”

After the verdict, the senior investigating officer who led the case, Detective Chief Inspector Leighton Harding, said: “Alfie suffered the most horrifying physical and emotional abuse at the hands of Scott and Howell. It is unimaginable to consider the fear and distress Alfie must have felt during the events that led to his collapse and death in his home on the morning of 18 February 2021. The physical violence he suffered at the hands of Scott and Howell, which involved being forced into a cold bath and his head held under water, caused his death.

Alfie experienced a 'sinister' regime of correction, a court heard (Supplied/West Mercia Police)

"The court heard evidence of a culture of excessive punishment of Alfie by Scott and Howell. Punishment amounted to beating Alfie with a belt and a slider until he was black and blue with bruising. He was often woken in the early hours of the morning and made to stand outside where Scott and Howell threw jugs of cold water over him. He was often grounded for excessive periods, made to stand for hours inside and outside his home, food removed from him, banished to his room, repeatedly forced into a bath of cold water and his head held under.

"The conduct of Scott and Howell was nothing less than serious physical and emotional abuse, inflicting the most cruel and inhumane treatment of Alfie. Alfie should have expected unconditional love and protection of Scott, yet she deliberately neglected his needs, choosing to prioritise her own needs and relationship with Howell, knowing the cruel treatment he was inflicting upon Alfie.

“Scott and Howell did nothing to protect Alfie and inflicted or permitted the torrent of physical and emotional abuse to continue time and time again. Both continued to lie to social services and police to protect themselves from their abuse being discovered, and even confronted and threatened neighbours and members of the public who reported concerns over their treatment of Alfie. At no stage has either of them shown any remorse or acceptance of responsibility for their actions.

“Today’s verdict will never undo the dreadful abuse Alfie suffered but it will mean those responsible for inflicting such terror and pain will face the consequences of their sickening actions.”

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BACK TO TOP ^

Pictures of the Day

At full stretch

Leon Marchand competes in the men’s 200m butterfly series during the French swimming championships in Rennes, western France. *AFP/Getty*

Richter scale

A visitor looks at Gerhard Richter's 11.5ft high artwork *Strip-Tower* at the Art Basel exhibition, Switzerland. *Getty*

Up in smoke

Palestinians try to extinguish flames engulfing a car after Israeli security forces raided the refugee camp of Balata on the West Bank. *AP*

Heavenly bodies

An artist adds the final touches to a mural painted under a bridge in New Delhi. *AFP/Getty*

Shuttle service

Wen Chi Hsu of Taiwan in action during her singles match at BWF Badminton World Tour at Istora Stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia. *EPA*

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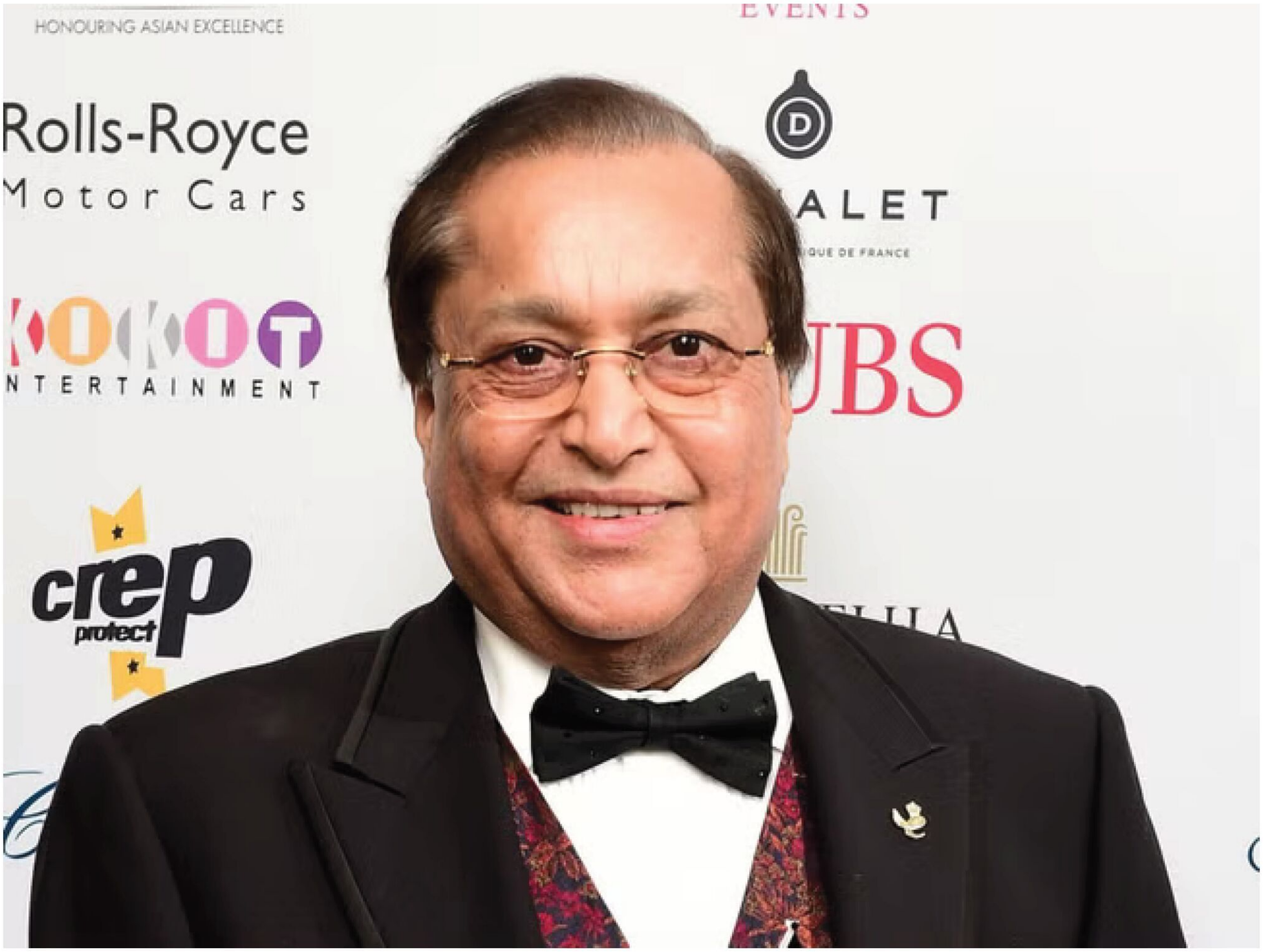
BACK TO TOP ^

Home news in brief


HONOURING ASIAN EXCELLENCE
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Motor Cars
ENTERTAINMENT
crep
protect
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UBS

Lord Ranger has been found to have harassed and bullied a female journalist (PA)

Tory peer made to apologise after calling journalist a 'presstitute'

A Conservative peer bullied and humiliated a women's rights campaigner both online and in person, a House of Lords investigation has found. Rami Ranger has been forced to apologise after the inquiry found he had harassed the campaigner and journalist on Twitter, calling her "the epitome of filth and garbage".

The top Tory donor also described the Indian journalist Poonam Joshi as “a total nutcase” and referred to her “poor upbringing” following argument at a Diwali event in parliament. After a complaint was made by Ms Joshi, Lords standards commissioner Akbar Khan found Lord Ranger had bullied and harassed Ms Joshi by “persistently undermining, humiliating and denigrating” the journalist.

The peer had made disparaging comments to Ms Joshi during the Diwali event in 2022 – including remarks such as “Know your place” and “Don’t try to be too big for your shoes”, although Mr Khan decided it was unlikely that he had shouted these words as Ms Joshi had claimed. Ms Joshi told the investigation that he had described her several times on as a “presstitute” – a slur used in India against journalists who criticise the country’s ruling BJP government.

Police served misconduct notices after Cardiff crash deaths

Two police officers in a marked van who followed two teenage boys on an electric bike before it crashed, killing them both, in Cardiff have been served with gross misconduct notices, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) said.

Kyrees Sullivan, 16, and Harvey Evans, 15, died last month, shortly after they were captured on CCTV being followed by a police van. The police watchdog said two police officers involved in the incident – the driver and passenger – have now been served with the notices and are under investigation, but clarified that this does not necessarily mean disciplinary action will follow.

The IOPC said police are reviewing hundreds of excerpts from video footage of the incident as part of their investigation.

Data shows majority of councils missed accounts deadline

Less than a third of councils published draft accounts by this year’s deadline, amid concerns over town hall finances and audit delays undermining local democracy. Research shows that 94 of

314 local authorities in England released accounts for 2022-23 by the required date of 31 May, with a further 5 per cent publishing by 2 June.

Of the 205 councils that had not published, 112 issued delayed publication notices, according to data provided by LG Improve. The most common reason cited was a problem with auditing accounts for the previous financial year. The process of valuing assets such as infrastructure was also mentioned, along with inadequate resources in finance departments.

While 19 per cent of councils had their accounts for 2020-21 signed off by auditors, 13 per cent have not, leaving limited opportunity for public scrutiny of councils' spending and financial health. *PA*

Barclay pledges NHS pay review body will 'operate effectively'

Ministers have pledged to examine evidence on how pay is set for more than a million NHS workers, the health secretary has announced. Steve Barclay called for unions and employers to "share their views" as he promised that work would be done to ensure that "the pay-setting process and the NHS pay review body operate effectively".

The NHS pay review body sets the pay award for NHS staff on the Agenda for Change contract, which includes all NHS workers apart from doctors, dentists and very senior managers. The body's work was called into question during the wave of strikes that hit the NHS in recent months.

The call for evidence comes as part of a package of additional "non-pay measures" the government said it would look at after a wave of industrial unrest in the NHS. Mr Barclay has written to staff on the Agenda for Change contract – including ambulance staff, nurses, porters, healthcare assistants and physiotherapists – setting out some of the measures. *PA*

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BACK TO TOP ^

Trump claims he did not hoard classified records

Former president arrested and attends court to hear charges

Donald Trump arrives at the Wilkie D Ferguson Jr Federal Courthouse in Miami yesterday (Getty)

ANDREW FEINBERG
IN MIAMI

Donald Trump was formally arrested yesterday as he attended a federal court to face charges that he illegally hoarded classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

The former president arrived by motorcade and police escort at the Wilkie Ferguson Jr Federal Courthouse in Miami. He was booked in alongside his co-defendant and aide Walt Nauta and pleaded not guilty.

He is the first-ever former US president to face federal charges, and the first to be criminally charged twice. In April, he pleaded not guilty to state charges in New York stemming from a hush-money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels.

Supporters wearing Make America Great Again hats and carrying American flags chanted “Miami for Trump” as the motorcade paused outside the courthouse. Authorities had braced for crowds of up to 50,000 and prepared for possible violence, recalling the 6 January riots.

Mr Trump approached yesterday’s court appearance with characteristic bravado, insisting that he has done nothing wrong and was being persecuted for political purposes. He has repeatedly proclaimed his innocence and accuses president Joe Biden’s administration of targeting him. He called special counsel Jack Smith, who is leading the prosecution, a “Trump hater” on social media.

Mr Smith accuses Mr Trump of risking national secrets by taking thousands of sensitive papers with him when he left the White House in January 2021 and storing them in a haphazard manner at his Mar-a-Lago Florida estate and his New Jersey golf club, according to a grand jury indictment released last week.

Photos included in the indictment show boxes of documents stored on a ballroom stage, in a toilet and strewn across a storage-room floor. The indictment also alleges Mr Trump lied to officials who tried to get them back. Despite his precarious legal situation, Mr Trump remains the clear frontrunner in the race to be the Republican nomination for president in 2024.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll on Monday showed Donald Trump still led rivals for the Republican nomination for the 2024 presidential election by a wide margin, with 81 per cent of Republican voters viewing the charges as politically motivated.

“I never imagined that I was going to witness this. It’s unbelievable,” said a woman who carried a sign that read “I Stand With Trump” outside the courthouse.

The judge assigned to the case, Aileen Cannon, was appointed by Mr Trump in 2020 and issued a ruling in his favour during the investigation last year that was reversed on appeal. US magistrate judge Jonathan Goodman, who led yesterday’s behind-closed-doors hearing, is not expected to play an ongoing role in the case.

Experts say it could be a year or more before a trial takes place due to the complexities of handling classified evidence.

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

Russia ‘losing 900 soldiers a day’ as Ukraine ups defence

A Ukrainian serviceman rides an armoured vehicle in the Donetsk region (Reuters)

BEL TREW

CHIEF INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT

Russia is losing a “staggering” 900 soldiers a day, Ukrainian officials have claimed, urging the West to greenlight delivery of fighter jets for its counteroffensive at a Nato meeting this week.

Yesterday, Ukraine’s deputy defence minister, Hanna Maliar, indicated the long-awaited counteroffensive was making headway, reporting that Ukrainian forces had taken back seven villages in the last week alone.

However, she said the advance was hard as Russian forces had superior air support and were showering their troops with intense artillery fire.

Yuriy Sak, a key advisor to the defence ministry, told *The Independent* that while Kyiv was inflicting “heavy” losses on Moscow’s forces, they urgently needed the delivery of fighter jets to keep up the momentum. Mr Sak said that he hoped the decision would be pushed through at a meeting of Nato defence ministers due to take place tomorrow in Brussels.

“During the last week, the losses against the Russians have been staggering: on average 900 soldiers have been killed a day by the Ukrainian army,” he said. “But this is not an easy battle,” he added. “The Russians continue to have command of the air, they have air superiority along the frontlines”.

He said Ukraine was in urgent need of 4th generation aircraft like F16s, a subject expected to be top of the agenda at the ministerial meeting in the Belgium capital.

“Had we had F16s by now the situation would have been different,” Mr Sak added. “We hope that watching how the counteroffensive develops is another important argument in favour of speeding up the process of creating this fighter jet coalition.”

Russia has launched a missile attack on Kryvyi Rih (Serhii Lysak/Telegram)

The request has come following the death of a top Russian officer who was killed in a missile strike in Zaporizhzhia. Sergei Goryachev, Chief of Staff of Russia's 35th Army, was described by officials as a "highly decorated officer". "The army has lost one of its brightest and most effective military commanders, who combined the highest professionalism with personal courage," one message on Telegram said.

Russia has not acknowledged any Ukrainian gains and instead reported that it had successfully repelled attempts to liberate territory in the eastern region of Donetsk. Yesterday, president Vladimir Putin claimed during a televised meeting with military bloggers that Ukrainian losses were 10 times those of Russian troops. He also suggested that the goals of Moscow's invasion might evolve with the situation, but that their fundamental character would not change.

Ukraine has kept quiet about the details of its long-anticipated counteroffensive but has heavily promoted it, even releasing a cinematic trailer featuring footage from the front line. This week, the Ministry of Defence posted a cryptic 30-second video of the country's spy chief Kyrylo Budanov sitting in silence behind his desk as the camera zoomed in and a caption read "Plans love silence".

The offensive is in its early days: tens of thousands of fresh Ukrainian troops and hundreds of Western armoured vehicles are yet to be committed to the fight. But Kyiv has already claimed some movement forward.

Russia has, meanwhile, ramped up its missile attacks on cities. Yesterday, it pounded Volodymyr Zelensky’s hometown of Kryvyi Rih, killing at least 11 people inside an apartment building and warehouse. More than two dozen others were said to be wounded. “More terrorist missiles,” Mr Zelensky wrote on Telegram. “Russian killers continue their war against residential buildings, ordinary cities and people.”

Air raid sirens also blared across the whole of Ukraine, with Kyiv’s military officials saying air defence forces destroyed all Russian missiles targeting the capital. Russia has also accused Ukraine of cross-border shelling on its territory, as Kyiv carries out counteroffensive operations. Moscow also released video footage of what it said were German-made Leopard tanks and US-made Bradley Fighting Vehicles captured in battle.

Ukraine accused Russia of blowing up a key dam in the southern region of Kherson this month, unleashing one of Europe’s biggest reservoirs over the area. Russia has denied the accusations and instead claimed Kyiv blew up its own dam.

Calling it a “terrorist attack” and a “war crime” Mr Sak said the explosion of the dam was aimed to “slow down or thwart” counteroffensive activities. “We had made contingency plans ... It has not had a considerable impact on our military plans,” he said.

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BACK TO TOP ^

Children who survived in jungle after plane crash are caught up in custody battle

ULEFONE
SHOT ON ARMOR 3W

The siblings' father has been accused of domestic abuse by their grandparents (AFP/Getty)

SHWETA SHARMA

A dispute over custody has erupted among relatives of four Indigenous children who miraculously survived a plane crash and spent 40 days alone in the Amazon rainforest in Colombia. The Colombia family welfare agency said they were not ruling out the possibility of domestic abuse experienced by the mother who died in the crash.

Four children, Lesly, 13, Soleiny, nine, Tien Noriel, four and one-year-old Cristin, survived in the dense Colombian jungle teeming with snakes, jaguars and mosquitos for over a month. The children, who belonged to the Huitoto Indigenous group, were stranded in the rainforest after their Cessna single-engine propeller plane crashed due to engine failure on 1 May. They survived by eating cassava flour, seeds, and fruits they found in the rainforest.

The siblings were the only survivors of the crash that killed everyone else onboard – including their mother Magdalena Mucutui Valencia. Revealing the harrowing details of their survival in the jungle, eldest daughter Lesly said their mother was alive for about four days after the crash before dying.

The head of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, Astrid Caceres, said they are investigating the family background as the maternal grandparents are vying for custody with their father. "We are going to talk, investigate, learn a little about the situation," Ms Caceres told BLU radio. She said they are not ruling out that they and their mother may have experienced domestic abuse. "The most important thing at this moment is the children's health, which is not only physical but also emotional, the way we accompany them emotionally," she said.

The children, who are currently receiving treatment in the hospital, have been assigned to a caseworker by the welfare agency at the request of their maternal grandparents. The decision came after Narciso Mucutuy, maternal grandfather, accused their father, Manuel Ranoque, of beating his daughter. He said that domestic harassment forced the children to hide in the forest when fighting broke out.

Speaking to the reporters, Mr Ranoque acknowledged there had been trouble at home, but he characterised it as a private family matter, not "gossip for the world". Mr Ranoque said: "Verbally, sometimes, yes. Physically, very little. We had more verbal fights.” He claimed the welfare agency would not allow him to meet the two oldest children at the hospital.

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BACK TO TOP ^

18+

WHAT IS

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AVAXHOME -

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World news in brief

Waves hit the Mumbai waterfront as India prepares for the arrival of Cyclone Biparjoy (AP)

Thousands evacuated in India and Pakistan ahead of cyclone

Pakistan's army and civil authorities are planning to evacuate 80,000 people to safety along the southern coast, while thousands in neighbouring India sought shelter, in anticipation of the arrival of Cyclone Biparjoy, which is forecast to make landfall in the densely populated countries later this week, officials said yesterday.

The cyclone is likely the most powerful to hit western India and Pakistan since 2021, and follows devastating floods that ravaged

Pakistan last year, leaving 1,739 people dead and costing the country $30bn (£24bn) in losses.

Biparjoy has been packing maximum sustained winds of 111 mph, according to the India Meteorological Department. It is projected to hit land tomorrow near the port of Jakhau in the Kutch district of Gujarat. Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority said the cyclone was 292 miles south of Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, yesterday morning.

In India, thousands were evacuated from low-lying regions, including residents living within three miles of the coast in Gujarat. Those within 6.2 miles of the coast might be moved over the next two days if required, officials said. *AP*

No Country for Old Men author McCarthy dies aged 89

Pulitzer Prize-winning US author Cormac McCarthy has died aged 89, his agent has confirmed. McCarthy, best known for his novels including *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men*, died at home yesterday of natural causes.

Throughout his career, he penned multiple novels, screenplays and short stories spanning the western and post-apocalyptic genres. His first novel *The Orchard Keeper* was published in 1965, though it was not until 1992 that he found true acclaim with his work *All the Pretty Horses*, the first volume of The Border Trilogy.

The book became a *New York Times* bestseller and sold 190,000 copies in hardcover within the first six months of publication, giving McCarthy the wide readership that eluded him for years. *No Country for Old Men*, later adapted into an Oscar-winning film starring Javier Bardem, was published in 2005. *PA*

Rights organisation says Modi's internet blackouts hurt the poor

More than 100 internet shutdowns enacted by India's Narendra Modi administration between 2019 and 2022 hurt the poor and the vulnerable by restricting their work opportunities and impairing their access to food and livelihoods, according to a new report. This directly contradicts the federal government's ambitious flagship programme "Digital India", which aimed to help millions of citizens across the country, the report by Human Rights Watch said.

India has deployed more internet blackouts, described as erratic and unlawful by researchers, than any other nation in the world since 2018, the report said. Such shutdowns hurt the poor in India in a number of ways, it explained, including preventing them from marking their attendance at a government employment scheme that allows people to earn a daily wage in villages and towns across the country.

Woman declared dead starts breathing during funeral

A 76-year-old woman from Ecuador who was pronounced dead last week started gasping for air and hitting the inside of her coffin at her funeral, according to reports.

Bella Montoya, who was admitted to a hospital on Friday after she suffered "a cardiac and respiratory arrest" and was later pronounced dead by local doctors, startled mourners when she started banging on the inside of the coffin as her relatives were preparing to change her clothes ahead of the burial.

According to the country's Ministry of Health, Ms Montoya had "suffered from cardiac and respiratory arrest without responding to resuscitation attempts, after which the duty doctor confirmed her death". The family was reported to have been given a death certificate.

Pilot arrested for stalking woman in low-flying plane

A man in Schuylerville, New York, has been arrested for violating a do-not-fly order after he was accused of stalking a woman from his low-flying plane and pelting her yard with tomatoes. Michael Arnold was arrested at Saratoga County airport after violating the protection order that was issued after a previous arrest in May.

The woman he was accused of stalking, Cassie Wilusz, said the incidents had been happening for almost four years, with her family – as well as the wider town – being subjected to the sound of Mr Arnold’s low-flying plane as he allegedly flew his single-engine Cessna over her home at 7am around three times a week.

“He is terrorising us,” Ms Wilusz told the *Times Union*. “He flies so close to the house that it feels like he’s going to go through it. It’s a nightmare that just doesn’t stop.” She also claimed that Mr Arnold had thrown tomatoes at her yard and her home from his plane on one occasion last year, and on another buzzed past her home a day after she lost her husband to cancer.

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BACK TO TOP ^

When I came out... my first hurdle was overcoming fear

Gigi Hadid, Edward Enninful, Bella Hadid and Adut Akech attend the 2022 Prince’s Trust Gala in New York (Getty)

EDWARD ENNINFUL

I was 16 years old when I first encountered a person who actually called themselves “gay”. An unthinkably late proposition today, but this was

1980s London, and I was a sheltered Ghanaian immigrant – a good, Christian schoolboy who kept his head down, worked hard and always had his father's words thundering in his ears: "If any of those gays come into this house, it will be over my dead body."

Of course, it was fashion that opened up the world for me. The genius stylist Simon Foxton was that first queer person I met when he scouted me as a model one fateful day on the Tube. I can safely say that moment changed my life forever. It led me first to modelling, then to becoming a stylist myself, then fashion director of *i-D* magazine, and eventually onward to Paris, Milan and New York.

But fashion changed much more than my prospects – it changed me as well. Suddenly, I was a teenager in London and meeting gay and trans people everywhere; photoshoots, parties, gigs, clubs. But did I feel pride? It was probably more complicated than that.

Before I came out, I mostly just felt scared. Actually, scratch that. I felt petrified. The fire and brimstone that would rage in church seemed so real that I genuinely thought I was going to hell and that a life – and afterlife – of eternal damnation awaited me. This is the way for a lot of young LGBT+ people still today, especially in religious communities. The feelings are terrifying, and can seem extremely real.

VOGUE
PRIDE & JOY
VOGUE
PRIDE & JOY
VOGUE
PRIDE & JOY

Throughout Pride month, British Vogue will represent different LGBT+ stories (British Vogue/Tim Walker)

In many ways, though, I was lucky. In the Ghanaian community I grew up in, the best you could usually hope for was silence and secrecy; an acceptance that you would never talk about "such things". I was extremely fortunate to have the mother I had. She loved me – I knew that always – and when I eventually told her I was gay at the grand old age of 21, having returned to London after a romantic epiphany on a New York dance floor, there was no question of me being exiled by the family.

Even my father came around. Sort of. I mean, he didn't kill me. As ever, in the LGBT+ community we rely on each other to be pioneers, and when my brilliant and charismatic cousin Michael – always my father's favourite – came out when I was 17, the turf had been softened. By the time I came out, they seemed more cross about the fact that I'd dropped out of my law degree and was vamping around in the unreliable world of fashion and photoshoots.

Others weren't as lucky as me. I saw friends and relatives in my community thrown out of their family homes. Meanwhile, the infamous Aids adverts, with their looming tombstones and terrifying iceberg visuals, were everywhere. Gay London – gay life – felt like it teetered on a knife's edge.

Recently, I've been thinking again about my past, my sexuality and our country as London's annual Pride celebrations come into view. It's been on my mind at work, too. This month, *British Vogue* is publishing a cover story and portfolio of images by the photographer Tim Walker, the intent of which is to encapsulate the breadth and wonder of the LGBT+ community in 2023.

In the July issue, you'll find exquisite fashion and thoughtful portraits, as well as interviews with a host of celebrities: raconteur supreme Miriam Margolyes, singers Janelle Monae and Rina Sawayama, and actors Emma D'Arcy and Bella Ramsey. It will also include interviews with the residents of Tonic Housing – the UK's first LGBT+ residential home for older people – such as Rose Ruth, a 90-year-old transgender woman who transitioned in her eighties, and whom I adore.

Looking through the pages of the issue, I’m struck by how powerful yet fragile so many of these lived lives seem. Despite a new generation who has rightly evolved beyond always needing those labels we once clung to, the world today remains unsafe, especially for the more marginalised in the LGBT+ community. Transphobia abounds, hate crimes are on the increase, and a scary establishment pushback seems wholly unable to grasp the idea that people are who they say they are. Gender fluidity is not new – the only difference now is that we are finally able to talk about it a bit more.

So, yes, Pride is important. Visibility is important. Inclusive human rights are very important. I love my home city – I have just bought a new house here and am excited to be continuing the work we’ve been doing at *British Vogue* during the past few years far into the future.

As I said, we all need to be pioneers for each other. Just like my cousin Michael was for me.

Edward Enninful is editor-in-chief of British Vogue and the European editorial director of Condé Nast

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BACK TO TOP ∧

What I saw at the ‘sex and gender’ debate horrified me

Socialist Worker
Trans Rights Now
Trans Rights Are Human Rights

Our society and the people who make it up are complex (AFP/Getty)

ROBIN MOIRA WHITE

I attended the Westminster Hall debate of the competing petitions calling for the Equality Act to be amended to redefine “sex” to mean biological sex (109,463 signatures), and not to do so (138,886 signatures). Around 30 MPs turned up to contribute to the debate, and there were some powerful speeches on both sides.

In opening the debate Tonia Antoniazzi (Labour, Gower) called for respectful debate and at the end MPs congratulated themselves on how respectful the whole affair had been.

That wouldn't be the impression you'd get if you were to look at social media, though. At one point SNP MP Kirsty Blackman was talking about the life struggles of a trans constituent. Caught on camera behind her, MP, lawyer and anti-trans campaigner Joanna Cherry MP KC (SNP, Edinburgh South West) gives the biggest eye-roll imaginable and then appears to mouth the words "What rubbish". Rosie Duffield (Labour, Canterbury) puts her head in her hands and Neal Harvey (Alba, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) plays along. It's a shocking sequence, and has already gained over a million views on Twitter.

Their behaviour defines the speeches of those supporting the "amend" petition. All the old tropes appeared. Statements that trans people should be supported and protected, before going on to support measures that would effectively banish us from society. Statements that equate trans people with criminals and speak of eliminating us from society because of the "risks" posed to women and girls. All so redolent of the way gay people were characterised during the time of section 28 in the 1990s. The fact that 13 years of the current legislation have not thrown up any real problems appears to have passed those MPs by.

Is the Equality Act difficult to follow? No. I have worked as a discrimination barrister for nearly 30 years. I have dealt with the 2010 Equality Act for 13 of them. It is a masterful piece of legislation dealing with nine separate protected characteristics, and allowing nuance.

Trans people can be excluded from single-sex spaces if it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. This is, effectively, permitted discrimination and is rightly, tightly controlled. If we are to accommodate trans people, then they need, in most circumstances, to be treated in the gender/sex they have transitioned to. Otherwise, transition is meaningless. "Third spaces" as a zone for trans people to be banished to is not the answer. "Third spaces" offering additional privacy for those who need or want it can be provided consistent with the existing legislation.

Complexity and diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated, not denigrated, ‘clarified’ out of existence and banished

The first petition proposals, calling for “sex” to be redefined as “biological sex” are at once muddled, unfair and unworkable. At the eleventh hour, the promoters – presumably realising that it is mightily difficult to satisfactorily define “biological sex” – have switched to calling for sex in the Equality Act to be “original birth certificate sex”, unchanged by a subsequent Gender Recognition Certificate.

UN special rapporteur on sexual orientation and gender identity Victor Madrigal-Borloz recently reported that the intention was to find a definition of “sex” that excluded trans people. The practical problems with any such change soon become obvious with a little thought.

Trans men, for example, who often look very masculine would be forced into female spaces and women would be forced to accept them there. Nuance and choice would be eliminated by a poorly thought out “sledgehammer” policy.

Our society and the people that make it up are complex, and legislation dealing fairly with all of us will necessarily be complex. Additional guidance for businesses and service providers may well be helpful, as long as it is provided by a respected source; not the disgraced and disgraceful Equality and Human Right Commission, whose name now has Orwellian “doublethink” overtones for many. Complexity and diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated, not denigrated, “clarified” out of existence and banished, as would seem to be the case for trans constituents in Canterbury, Edinburgh, Kirkaldy or Cowdenbeath should they approach their MPs.

Fortunately, both the opposition and even the present government appear to recognise the difficulties and complexities of such legislation. Responding at the end of the debate, Anneliese Dodds, Labour shadow equalities minister, supported the existing legislation and Maria Caulfield, junior equalities minister, spoke of the further work that is necessary before any proposal can be brought forward. Hopefully, a refresh of government at the forthcoming general election will allow mature reflection on the way forward for all.

Robin Moira White is the first barrister to transition in practice at the discrimination bar and is the joint author of the leading text on transgender law

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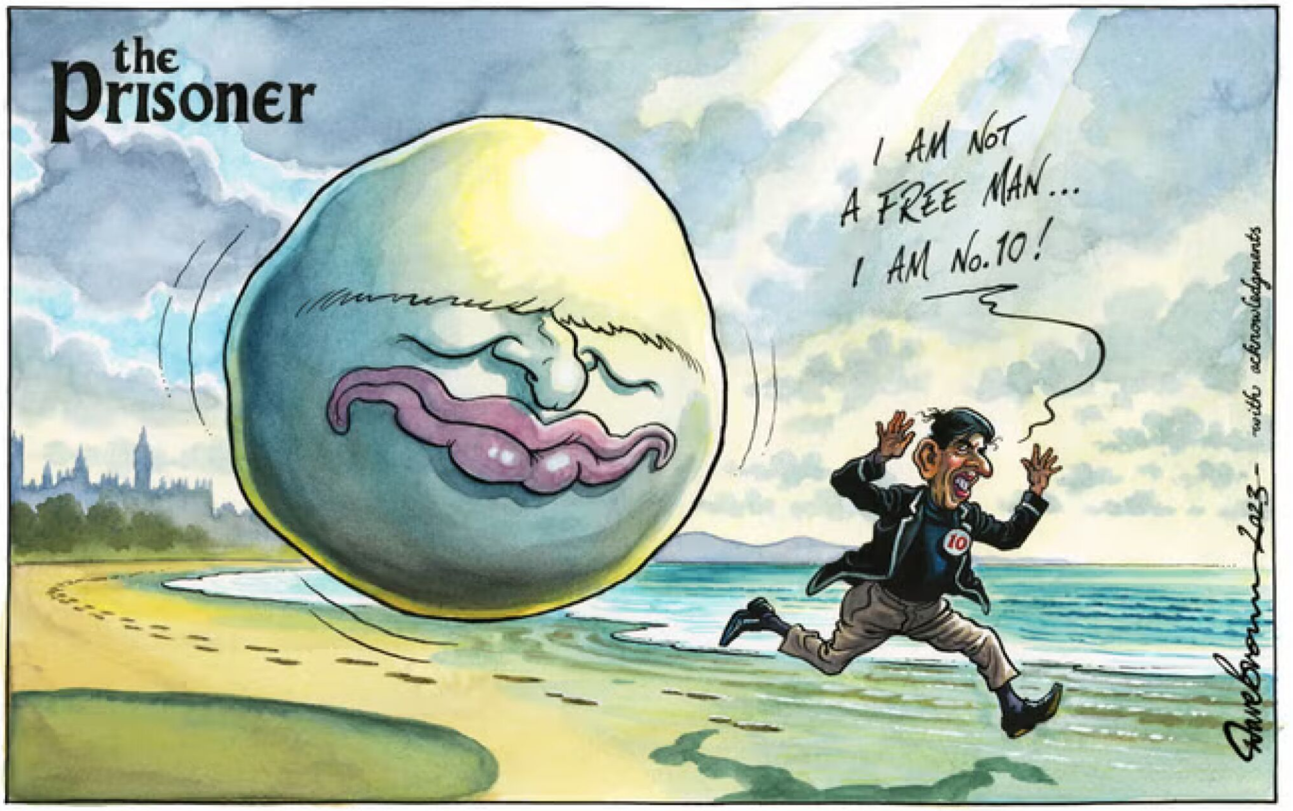
BACK TO TOP ^

Voices

Tory wheels are coming off as Starmer takes pole position


the Prisoner
I AM NOT A FREE MAN... I AM No.10!
10
Dave Brown 2023 - with acknowledgments

JOHN RENTOUL

CHIEF POLITICAL COMMENTATOR

In the past seven days, Rishi Sunak and Boris Johnson have gone to war, Nicola Sturgeon has been arrested and Caroline Lucas has stood down as the country’s only Green MP.

Four by-elections are imminent, two of them being excellent prospects for the Labour Party – Uxbridge and South Ruislip, vacated by Johnson, and Rutherglen and Hamilton West, likely to be vacated by Margaret Ferrier, formerly of the Scottish National Party but suspended from the House of Commons after breaching Covid rules.

Meanwhile, Johnson is making as much noise as possible on his way out, calling everyone names and trying to do as much damage as he can to the man he blames for bringing him down and who now holds the office to which Johnson thinks only Johnson is entitled.

As the wheels fall off his opponents, Keir Starmer has found himself sitting in the front seat of a self-driving car. Sunak has tried to stay above the fray, and indeed I thought he looked impressive when he finally drew a line between him and Johnson yesterday: "Boris Johnson asked me to do something I wasn't prepared to do," he said, referring obliquely to the former prime minister's nominations for peerages. "If people don't like that, then tough."

Satisfying as this might have been for Sunak and for most of the rest of us, the prime minister had hoped to manoeuvre Johnson out of the limelight without causing by-elections, so the net result was not great for the government.

Who knows the truth of the silly dispute with which Johnson marked his exit: the Case of the Mysterious Disappearing Lords Nominations. But the bottom line is that the general public thinks that Nigel Adams, Nadine Dorries and Alok Sharma shouldn't be given peerages anyway, and that Johnson and Dorries seem petulant for complaining about it.

To that extent, Sunak has minimised the damage. He should also be grateful that he avoided another by-election in Sharma's seat, Reading West, which is also a seat that Labour should win easily with a strong message about the party's appeal in middle England.

> **From Starmer’s point of view, though, a government by-election defeat at the hands of Ed Davey is almost as good as one inflicted by Labour**

It is unclear who will win the other two by-elections, caused by Dorries and Adams, Johnson’s cheerleader and fixer respectively, resigning after being denied peerages. I suspect Labour is putting on a great show of contesting the right of the Liberal Democrats to present themselves as the main challenger in Dorries’s Mid Bedfordshire seat, but that Starmer will turn down the volume once peacocking honours are satisfied, and focus on winning in Johnson’s former seat of Uxbridge. Mid Beds is the sort of safe Tory seat that the Lib Dems can win in a by-election, but Labour cannot, even though Labour came second in the general election.

Selby and Ainsty, Adams’s former seat, is a more open question because the Lib Dems have no local council representation there – and the Selby part of the constituency used to be a Labour seat in the Blair years. Still, the Lib Dems won North Shropshire, Owen Paterson’s former seat, where they initially protested they had no local presence, so again I think the Lib Dems have the better chance. Lifetime Tory voters in safe Tory seats will happily vote Lib Dem as a protest, but they won’t vote Labour.

From Starmer’s point of view, though, a government by-election defeat at the hands of Ed Davey is almost as good as one inflicted by Labour.

In the meantime, Caroline Lucas standing down as the Green MP for Brighton Pavilion gives Labour the hope of gaining another seat at the general election. Not all of her strong personal vote will transfer to Sian Berry, the Green candidate who hopes to succeed her.

Then on Sunday, Nicola Sturgeon was arrested and questioned, making it harder for the SNP to resist Labour's recovery in Scotland, which simultaneously makes Starmer's ambition to form a majority government in the Commons more credible – without his having to do anything except sit tight and dispense platitudes.

Starmer should be careful of resting on his laurels this week because it is always when Prime Minister's Questions looks like an open goal that the leader of the opposition tends to fumble it. But in the six days since the standards committee confirmed that Margaret Ferrier would be open to a recall petition, and therefore to a by-election that could almost have been designed to send the message that Labour is back as a force to be reckoned with in Scotland, everything has gone wrong for Starmer's opponents.

The Labour leader should savour the schadenfreude while it lasts.

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BACK TO TOP ∧

WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2023

Voices

Artificial intelligence could transform the way we teach

Could it help reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged children by giving them a free 'personal tutor'? (PA)

BARONESS BARRAN

Long before ChatGPT was born, Rita Skeeter – the witch and reporter in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* – was the proud owner of a "Quick Quotes Quill" which could write her articles instantly. We all, including our children, now have similar magic at our fingertips, with ChatGPT and other large language models on our phones.

However, unlike Rita Skeeter, we want to be sure that these tools are used honestly and for our personal and mutual advancement.

The AI genie is out of the bottle – the question is how we should use it to best effect. In medicine, artificial intelligence is supporting doctors to assess patients and make important diagnoses. Businesses across the world are also using it to streamline processes and boost employee productivity. AI has huge potential in our schools, colleges and universities too, helping teachers and lecturers to manage their workloads more effectively, and even giving students personalised feedback on their work.

But can it do more? Could AI help children with special needs and disabilities learn more intuitively? Could it ease a teacher’s administrative burden by doing the heavy lifting on routine tasks like marking? Could it help reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged children by giving them a free “personal tutor”? We need to know the answers to be able to get the most out of it, and to make sure that we design carefully how we keep a “human in the loop”, because our strongest asset in England will always be our brilliant teaching workforce.

We know that with any new technology comes risk. But what we can’t do is pull up the drawbridge

Today, Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, will announce a call for evidence on the use of AI in education settings. This is a chance for everyone who has a view on how we might harness generative AI effectively and safely across education to have their say. We want teachers and school leaders, lecturers and classroom assistants, practitioners and academics to contribute and tell us what they think so that we can learn from their experiences. We want experts in technology and in data privacy to share their views. This will inform how we channel these extraordinary new technologies for the benefit of all.

We know that with any new technology comes risk. This is why the prime minister’s commitment to hold the first global summit on AI safety this autumn is so important. But what we can’t do is pull up the drawbridge.

More broadly, we all will need to build our digital skills – whatever our digital starting point. Which is why from September this year, adults with low levels of digital skills will be able to study new Digital Functional Skills Qualifications. These will give all adults a chance to get the essential digital skills they need to participate actively in modern-day life and work, from managing finances online to utilising workplace digital tools, such as email and virtual meeting applications. This will prepare people to take on new jobs with more confidence, or just to approach online life without being too scared to press “send”.

We know that technology is developing at breakneck speed. It is going to have a huge impact on us, on the way we live, learn and work. We owe it to the next generation to maximise its potential, help grow the economy and, like Rita Skeeter, harness its magic.

Baroness Barran MBE is minister for the school system and student finance

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BACK TO TOP ∧

Johnson's lies have ignited a civil war in the Tory party

So, yet again, we see more evidence of Boris Johnson trying to get around the system by requesting help from Rishi Sunak over the former prime minister's resignation honours list. While I commend Rishi Sunak for snubbing Johnson's latest attempted fast one, this will do absolutely nothing to clear up the distrust and sleaze that has trashed the Tory brand and that dominated the final days of Johnson's leadership.

If the Tories want a reasonable chance to stay in government after the next election, then the bitter civil war ignited by Johnson's allies must stop and Conservative MPs must unite behind Sunak. Though that is still a long shot.

Geoffrey Brooking *Havant, Hampshire*

I'm binning my Newcastle season ticket

For some years now, I've had the impression that the UK's relationship with Saudi Arabia represented the absolute worst of this country for a number of reasons.

The hypocrisy of pursuing policies and legislation in pursuit of a "war on terror", while laying out the red carpet for the state that inspired many of the extremists we claim to oppose. The obvious contradiction between claiming to uphold human rights and democracy around the world, while maintaining an alliance with a barbaric, authoritarian, absolute monarchy. The absolute jaw-dropping corruption and spineless deference involved in all of our political leader’s dealings with the Saudi government, and the shamelessness of the media and politicians who defend Saudi Arabia and work to soften its image.

Fortunately, none of that ever had anything to do with supporting Newcastle United. Like many fans, I have also been opposed to the growing commercialisation and financialisation of football. Every decision made by the game’s governing bodies seems to be made with the intention of funnelling money to an elite few who have attached themselves to the sport’s top clubs, with fans the very last consideration.

I have been attending Newcastle matches with my dad for 32 years since I was six years old, and we’ve held season tickets in the same seats for the entire time, renewing them every year. It was going to take an awful lot to make me decide to end that lifelong routine. In the end, it was the state of Saudi Arabia taking over the club that was the end of me going to matches (First golf, now Saudi Arabia aims to take over football, Voices, 8 June).

In my view, supporters could have responded to the news by making it clear that we wanted nothing to do with this despotic regime. I believe a strong enough response would have killed the takeover for good. Only a collective effort will finally allow supporters to make themselves heard. Saudi activists have told us that they believe the owners would leave if faced with any significant protests from fans, so there is every incentive to keep going.

In the meantime, the club’s reputation is in the gutter, and while that’s partly because of the ownership, it’s also down to a section of supporters who seem determined to accelerate NUFC’s transformation into a plastic, soulless, super-club, which represents an oppressive regime as much as our own community. For as long as that remains the case, I won’t be making any effort to get back to St James’ Park.

Andrew Page *Address supplied*

Common decency is under attack

I read Adam Forrest's recent article (Mordaunt urges Tories to end divisive culture wars, News, yesterday) with interest, particularly as I believe Penny Mordaunt is correct. Many in her party allude to the Civil Service as the "Blob" which is demeaning, unfair but has resonated in the public's mind. To keep attacking institutions such as the judiciary and even more recently members of the Privileges Committee who are investigating Boris Johnson and Partygate is just awful.

This is not grown-up behaviour and lacks credibility, decency and decorum and the government and this party are travelling fast down a rabbit hole of their own injudicious making. Naturally being a Labour supporter, they can carry on ad infinitum as far as I am concerned but it is still wrong and makes a mockery of decent, upstanding people who inhabit these committees of all political persuasions.

This party is at the end of the present political line and needs an urgent reset before more people and well-respected institutions come into its firing line.

Judith A Daniels *Norfolk*

This is not education, it's abuse

In the time when the only school inspection regime was Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools, it was recognised that a more effective, all-enveloping system was needed. We school leaders took part in exhaustive consultations as to what sort of inspection system it should be.

There were two ways forward, the "judgemental" model, and the "developmental". With the latter, the inspector's role was that of a critical friend, holding to account indeed, yet advising on how to improve. Clearly school leaders at that time argued for this model to be adopted. The government of the time chose the "judgmental" model – the regime we have now, Ofsted.

We ruefully shook our heads, knowing that a golden opportunity to improve schools, inform and involve parents, had been lost. We knew that you don’t improve something by just measuring it and denigrating those who were giving heart and soul to make things better.

The current situation, and the tragic death of headteacher Ruth Perry, surely make it imperative that we revisit this debate, and rethink why we are inspecting, the way we inspect, and, above all abandon the ridiculous idea that an institution as complex as a school can be summed up in one word or phrase. Would any teacher or parent judge a child in this way, and sum them up in one word? This is not education, it’s abuse.

John Daintith *Chew Magna, Somerset*

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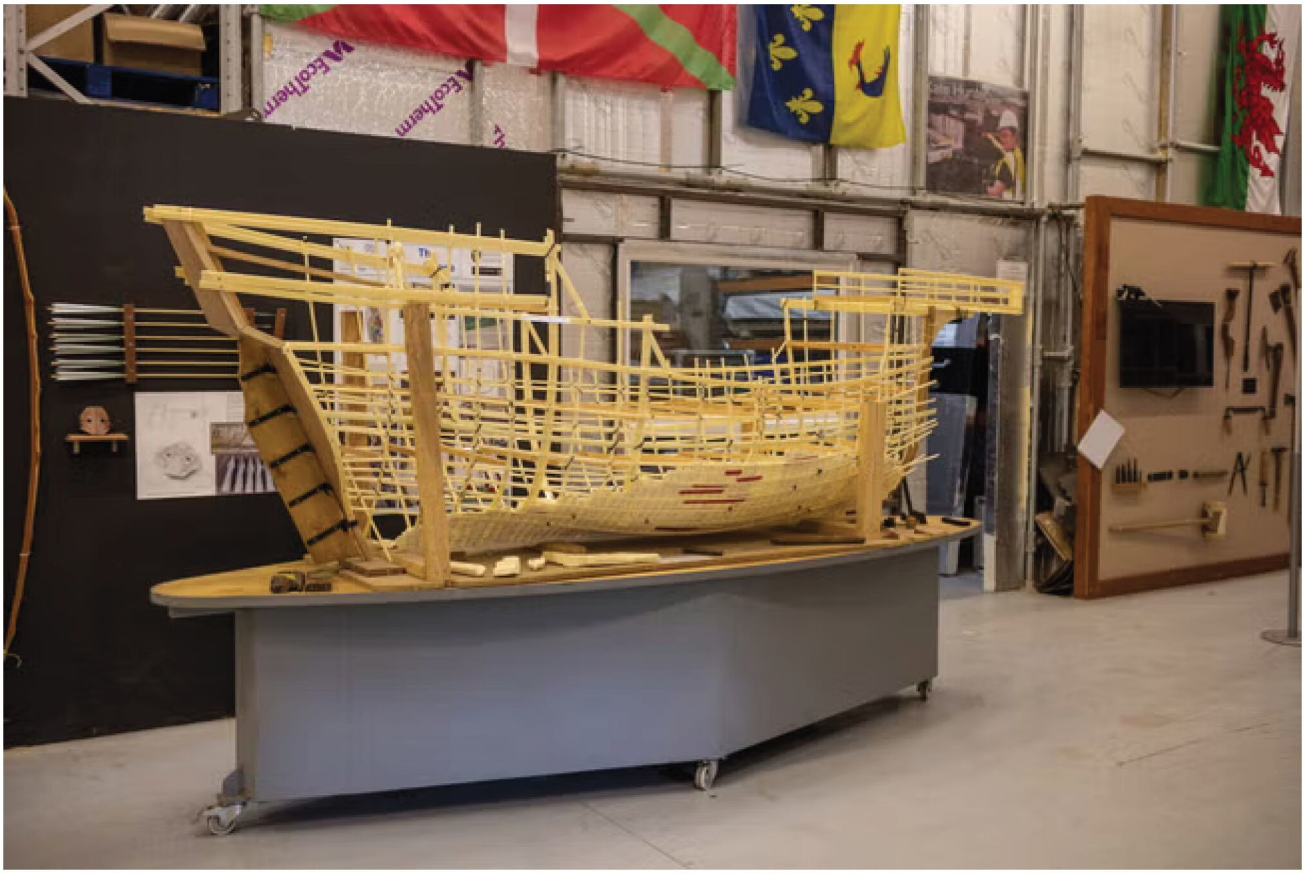
BACK TO TOP ^

A rare medieval ship awaits the final stage of her voyage

Restoring this aged vessel means putting 2,500 pieces back together and finding it a forever home, writes **William Booth**



A scale model, kept in a warehouse in Newport, shows the salvaged lower part of the ship and what the rest of the vessel might have looked like (Images by Simon Bray/The Washington Post)

It is a ship with no name, none we know today. How it ended up in this port town, buried under mud for 534 years, is a mystery. But archaeologists have determined it is the most important late-medieval vessel to be discovered. Now the hard part is finding a forever home for it – and putting its 2,500 pieces back together.

Today the timbers of the ship are stored in a bare-bones warehouse in an industrial park. Inside we find Toby Jones, curator of the Newport Medieval Ship Project, a former deep-sea diver from Oregon, a nautical archaeologist with degrees from Texas A&M and the University of Wales. He opens the doors to the storage vaults that hold the ship's pieces, each marked with numbered tab. The first thing that hits you is the smell. It smells good.

The timbers – some as thick as tree trunks, others no longer than a school ruler – retain a rich earthy scent, still a little piney from the tar used as caulking. Knock your knuckles on the planking and you can feel how hard the oak still is. "Normally, these planks would all be rotted, like a sponge, but they are not," Jones says. It was the mud. Low oxygen. No worms. Only a shake of salt. "The timbers were waterlogged, yes, but remained so dense you could make a cricket bat out of it," he says.

'The people who built this were master craftsmen': Toby Jones, a nautical archaeologist, is overseeing the restoration

The original ship was at least 100ft (30.5m) long, maybe 120ft overall, and could have carried the equivalent of 225,000 bottles of wine. The shipbuilders likely constructed the whole vessel without the use of a single saw blade, employing instead axes and adzes, mallets and wedges. All of it built by eye, no blueprint, no paper plans. "Look at the edges," Jones says, pointing to the joinery. "It's so sharp, it's almost perfect, like laser cuts."

He massages the wood. "We think of the medieval age as a bunch of peasants. But the people who built this ship were master craftsmen." Exact nail patterns. Complete consistency, mirrored port to starboard. “We haven’t found any mistakes,” he says.

The *Newport Medieval Ship* was discovered in 2002, when contractors building a performing arts centre were excavating the shoreline of the River Usk, driving down concrete piles (17 of them right through the boat), before they uncovered what appeared to be wooden flotsam. These were in fact immense timbers, still joined by thousands of wrought-iron nails: a keel, frame, planking, stringers.

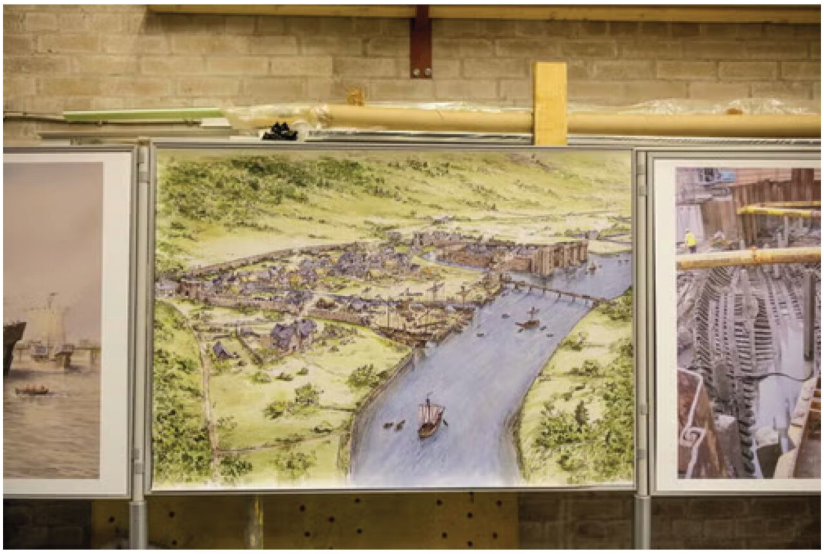
One of the lead archaeologists of the recovery, Nigel Nayling of the University of Wales, was called in that very first day, when everything was still half buried in muck. “We found a boat,” he wrote. For a long time, they didn’t know what kind of boat, where it was from, or how old it might be. Over the past two decades, the vessel’s hull has been excavated, disassembled, dissected, catalogued, desalted, bathed and freeze-dried for preservation.

Pieces of the ship are stored in a warehouse, awaiting the next stage of their voyage

Dendrochronology records (tree rings) revealed that the majority of the timbers were felled in 1449 in northern Spain, then hauled by river raft or ox cart, probably to San Sebastian, where it was built. The three-masted ship was designed to ferry heavy casks of new wine from Iberia to England. It launched just a year or two before Columbus was born, and it sailed in the opening chapters of the age of discovery, of colonialism, of global trade, Jones said, as the Middle Ages leaned into the Renaissance.

The 1,000 artefacts found on the bilge – lice combs, a silver French coin, rat droppings, pointy shoes with curly toes, flowering heather, a helmet with a Latin inscription – have also been put under the microscope. The crew – 40 or 60? Likely Portuguese? – ate oysters, pomegranates and salted fish, based on bones and seeds recovered. The sailors slept beside the livestock they slaughtered to eat on the weeks-long passages. They played an early version of backgammon – the archaeologists found the board game and pieces. They were plagued by fleas and pilfered wine from the casks, as evidenced by discreet holes drilled into the stores.

They were brave mariners. There was no GPS, no weather forecast. Navigation was crude. They sailed along the coasts and across the famously stormy Bay of Biscay.



An artist's impression of the River Usk in medieval times

But this ship didn't sink at sea. "The ship wasn't a shipwreck," Jones says. "It's not a time capsule like a shipwreck, which represents a moment in time."

Instead, it seems to have been pulled into a shallow inlet on a high tide and propped up in a cradle for repairs. And then somehow it fell over on its side – and the repairs were abandoned and the ship was half gutted, with everything of value stripped. The wooden cradle in Newport dates to 1469. So the ship sailed for about 20 years. The surviving section of hull is so large and so heavy it will need a massive museum hall to display it – with temperature and humidity control. It will need a custom-built cradle that will allow the timbers to be hung.

Jones explains: “All museum ships all over the world are collapsing under their own weight. You can’t fight physics. A ship in a cradle is not a ship floating in the water. Ships are not happy out of water, and so the timbers will deform around the pressure points, so we have to get it just right, and have to have a really smart cradle.”

The cradle would go into the display space first. Jones and a team of six would then spend three years reassembling the ship in situ, by fastening the timbers onto the cradle, likely in the same order as the original builders, starting with the keel, adding the planking and then the frames.

Among the artefacts found on the ship are pieces of helmet from 14th-century Italy

"It's way too big to drive down the road," he says. Also, he cautions: "We are not rebuilding the ship, we are building a museum display that looks like a ship."

He envisions cool video graphics to ghost in the missing parts of the ship for visitors. All this would need funding, of course. Right now work on the ship is being supported by grants from the local city council – in one of the poorer regions of Wales. Jones is the lone paid employee. He answers the phone, gives tours, publishes papers. "She needs a rich friend, our ship does," says Charles Ferris, chair of the Friends of the Newport Ship, who confesses: "I worry about her future."

And if they can find a space and build a cradle and sort out all the logistics, how long will all this take? "I don't see why in five years, in 10 years, why can't it be done?" says Jones, which would mean he could spend 30 years of his life – his career – on this one ship. He would like to go home to Oregon some day, he confesses. "But I really want to see the ship put back together first."

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BACK TO TOP ∧

ON THIS DAY

BS & SONS
LIMITED
CHES HIRE
HOOPER'S
BOATS TO LET

The first Henley Regatta on the Thames took place on this day in 1839 (PA)

1645: The Battle of Naseby took place in Northamptonshire during the Civil War. Cromwell's Parliamentarians (Roundheads) defeated the Royalists (Cavaliers) under Prince Rupert, defending King Charles I.

1789: Whiskey distilled from maize was first produced – by a clergyman, the Rev Elijah Craig. He called the liquor bourbon because he lived in Bourbon County, Kentucky.

1839: The first Henley Regatta on the Thames took place.

1840: The first reduced-rate railway excursion was introduced when Newcastle & Carlisle Railway ran a works family outing from Newcastle to Carlisle.

1873: King Priam's treasure of 8,700 priceless pieces was discovered in Turkey by German/American Heinrich Schliemann. In disinterring it, he destroyed what was left of Troy.

1919: Captain John Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Whitten-Brown took off from Newfoundland on the first non-stop transatlantic flight to Galway, Ireland, in a Vickers Vimy.

1940: German troops entered Paris and the Swastika flew from the Eiffel Tower. Eight days later the armistice was signed and the Vichy government was set up.

1970: Bobby Charlton played his 106th and last football match for England in the World Cup in Mexico. His first was on 19 April 1958 against Scotland.

1982: Argentinian troops on the Falkland Islands surrendered when General Mario Benjamin Menendez agreed to an armistice.

On this day last year: 14 June marked five years since the Grenfell Tower disaster that claimed the lives of 72 people.

Birthdays

Mike Yarwood, entertainer, 82; **Donald Trump**, former United States president, 77; **Paul Boateng**, former British High Commissioner to South Africa, 72; **Will Patton**, actor, 69; **Boy George,** singer, 62; **Yasmine Bleeth**, actor, 55; **Steffi Graf**, former tennis player, 54; **Alan Carr**, comedian, 47; **Jesy Nelson**, singer, 32.

PA

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BACK TO TOP ^

Thirty, flirty and declining

If all the signifiers of adulthood – a well-paid job, a mortgage, starting a family – seem elusive for twentysomethings, why does turning 30 still stoke so much fear, asks **Eloise Hendy**

HAPPY 30TH BIRTHDAY
JOEY

Many unhappy returns: Joey turns 30 on 'Friends' (Warner Bros Television)

Recently, I went away for a joint birthday weekend with 10 friends I've known since childhood. All of us had either just turned, or were about to turn 30. Hungover in a Dorset Airbnb, we loaded up the classic time travel romcom *13 Going on 30*. What other film could we choose? Together, we laughed at the fantasy depiction of a 30-year-old life: a luxurious Manhattan apartment, a high-flying editorial job at a magazine, a walk-in wardrobe, no student debt in sight. But we also felt unsettled by the fact that the last time we all watched the film together was on its release in 2004. Back then we were all 11 and – much like the film's teenage protagonist who magically conjures herself into the future, wishing to be "thirty, flirty and thriving" – we were eager to skip over the messiness of adolescence and get to adulthood, where we imagined life would really *start*. But now we were finally there, why did it feel, not like life was over exactly, but that a significant part of it was ending?

Approaching 30 this year, it's been impossible not to notice how this particular "age milestone" still has the capacity to make people lose their minds. Suddenly, everyone around me was talking about babies and mortgages. But mainly in tones that ranged from ironic and nihilistic ("I can't have a baby, I am a baby") to pure panic ("I'll be renting forever"). With a Big Life Stage on the horizon, people made Big Life Decisions – but ones that also seemed designed to put off "the trappings of adulthood" a little longer. People in stable jobs suddenly quit them; others sold their belongings and went travelling; at least two people I know moved to Australia. "How do you feel about turning 30," everyone asked everyone. "Totally fine," everyone replied, with a crazed look in their eyes.

Research suggests that panicking about an impending age goes far beyond the anecdotal – according to a 2022 survey for the relationship support charity Relate, 77 per cent of 25- to 39-year-olds and 83 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds feel pressure to reach traditional life milestones. The charity also revealed "milestone anxiety" is a topic that is increasingly coming up in therapy sessions. The big question is *why*? Why do certain age milestones hold such weight, such emotional power? What is it about turning 30 in particular that causes so much angst and anxiety?

"We focus on the loss and not the gain when getting older," Amy*, who is now 33, tells me. "I think the freak-out part comes from the expectation that after 30 you need to be more settled –

know what job you want to do, be doing that job, live somewhere that feels like your home, have kids or start to have kids if you want them." This expectation to be settled – to have "sorted things out" – can make the lead-up to 30 feel like a pressure cooker. "No one's hyped for 30 like the 21 milestone," Amy says. "Twenty-one marks the start of an era and 30 kind of marks the end of one". Eleanor, who turned 30 in December, echoes this sentiment. "We've grown up with the idea that life ends at 30," she says. Although she admits everyone knows this is "a total lie", she says it still contributes to the sense "you've done the good bit and the rest is getting old".

Part of the issue here seems to lie in how much contemporary culture eulogises being in your twenties. Within the creative industries especially, numerous prizes and opportunities are offered for "emerging" practitioners – which sometimes means under 25, and almost always means under 30. "Thirty under 30" lists have become a media staple, feeding a sense that 30 is a cut-off point of sorts, after which achievements matter less, as you "should" have not only "emerged" but become established. There is a pervasive social narrative that your twenties are for exploration, adventure and fun, but also for figuring things out and setting yourself up in the world. Instability and uncertainty is written off in your twenties – or even lauded as part and parcel of "being young" – but if you then find yourself at the end of the decade without a stable partner, a "proper" job, and a healthy savings account, a nagging feeling of failure can creep in. "We've grown up with the idea that by 30 we'll be married with kids and a house," Eleanor suggests. This "very traditional, heteronormative version of life" is changing, she stresses, but adds that on a personal level "letting go of those subconscious success markers is quite tough".

> **I got really envious and devalued the things I did have, while really overvaluing the things I didn't have**

For the last six years, Hannah has been working as an English teacher in north London. By all accounts, she seemed to have made a success of her twenties, and found not just a job, but a career she both enjoyed and excelled in. She'd recently been promoted. Yet, in the run-up to turning 30 last month, she also found herself gripped by self-doubt – a feeling of "I have failed my life", she says. She felt drained and chronically stressed. She kept getting sick. Other teachers were quitting around her, and Hannah steadily realised that, like them, she was experiencing an extreme form of burnout – but her internal narrative that she "wasn't where she should be", that she was failing, "meant that my job was the thing I was clinging on to, even though it wasn't making me very happy". Finally, just weeks before her 30th birthday, Hannah quit. "I got to a stage where I was like, 'if I live my life like it's over then it will be'."

Much has been made of how "the millennial generation" has been experiencing a "prolonged adolescence": "settling down" later than previous generations; changing jobs more often; living with parents or in shared housing for longer. Some people might assume that all this anxiety around turning 30 stems from a desire to prolong the adolescent stage even further – that it comes from a reluctance to accept the realities of adulthood, that "the millennial generation" is also "the snowflake generation". Yet to me, it seems clear that the opposite is true. For today's twentysomethings, adulthood is held perpetually out of reach, and, actually, we haven’t really been having much fun anyway.

Dominant cultural scripts about “success markers” bump up against a world in which wages have stagnated, rents and house prices have skyrocketed, and the expansion of university education followed by the introduction of £9,000 tuition fees has left a vast swathe of young people loaded with debts upwards of £50,000. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that three-quarters of graduates will never pay it all back. Meanwhile, the “ASHE table” on age group earnings published by the Office of National Statistics reports that the average salary for 22-29-year-olds in the UK is £25,178. With average monthly rents outside London soaring to a record high of £1,190 in the first quarter of this year, is it any wonder traditional life milestones are being met later? When you’re just trying to make rent, having children before 35 can feel like the last thing on anyone’s minds (especially as childcare costs also soar and precarious employment becomes more commonplace for under-thirties).

This political backdrop is also why I believe “30 anxiety” goes beyond questions of gender. I’ve heard from numerous people – from twentysomethings to sixtysomethings – that women freak out about turning 30, and men freak out about turning 40. Certainly, women face a different set of social expectations when it comes to ageing; the sexist, ageist voice of the patriarchy sounding a lot like Leonardo DiCaprio’s subconscious. Yet, most of the discussion I’ve seen about this age milestone seems to work from the assumption that it’s all biological, and the issue comes down to the ticking timebomb of women’s body clocks. Speaking to women on either side of the 30 threshold, however, the dominant feeling wasn’t anxiety at the idea of “time running out”, but frustration that conversations about “family planning” are pinned to them and not men their age. Thirty-three-year-old Holly, for example, says she’s “noticed a change since turning 30 in how frequently older generations feel it’s OK to ask when you’re finally gonna have kids”.

Lies, all lies: Jennifer Garner in the 2004 romcom '13 Going on 30' (Shutterstock)

Any belief that milestone anxiety only affects women, or only concerns fertility, seems misguided at best, and at worst, a perpetuation of harmful stereotypes about women's role in society. Certainly, all the conversations I've had with men and women alike reveal something much starker about turning 30, and how the age is loaded with deeper, underlying fears – about how to navigate the contemporary world, what success and failure look like, and how stability, happiness and hope seem so fleeting and fragile.

Dan, a senior programme officer for an international scholarships and fellowships programme, turned 30 last autumn. His twenties were a struggle, he tells me. "It took a long time to build up and get to somewhere I was comfortable with, and there was a lot of unhappiness along the way." Yet, at the same time, he also felt a degree of freedom. "People always told me 'you don't need to worry about your age because your twenties are for yourself, and then life begins to track you down after that'," he explains. "So, in my head I've always fixated on the idea that there's no difference between being 24 and 29, because I'm just doing what I want to right now." At 29, he "got to a point where [he] was really happy." But, with the prospect of turning 30 looming, he was dogged by the thought life was about to start "tracking him down", and kept thinking, "I'm in a good place now and I absolutely do not want to let it go". On the day of his 30th itself, Dan says he felt "completely overwhelmed that all of my chickens were coming home to roost, and everything that I'd spent my twenties looking for in terms of happiness and comfort were up in the air because I'd have to start cashing in the cheques of being 30". Essentially, he believes it was "the spectre of responsibility" that caused this emotional whirlwind. To me, though, it also seems to signal how hostile contemporary society can feel for young people today – how hard-won and temporary happiness seems, while the pressure to conform to social expectations feels bullish.

I turn 30 in a month and, at times, the prospect of it has felt like a spotlight has been thrown on every part of my life, illuminating all the scrappy, messy bits; all the things I'd like to change. "I got really envious," Hannah admits, "and devalued the things I did have, while really overvaluing the things I didn't have." Since quitting her job, though, this feeling has started to dissipate. Now, she says the main question she keeps asking herself is: "If this is my life, what could it look like – not in terms of what could it [contain], but how could I feel about living it?" To begin to figure this out, though, she's had to put aside what society constitutes as success. "I find it difficult to disentangle my ageing from the world I'm doing it in," she adds.

In a state of perma-crisis, under successive anti-youth Tory-led governments, this is a difficult task. Yet, on a personal level, perhaps the only answer is to try and see models of "successful adulthood" as what they are: a fantasy. Since turning 30, Dan has realised "nothing has changed". He says he's even "regressed". "I'm playing *Crash Bandicoot* and I bought Pokemon cards off Ebay recently, and I enjoy Star Wars lego, and I've just quit my job." He laughs. "I don't know if that counts as a mid-life crisis but perhaps it might be!"

**Names have been changed*

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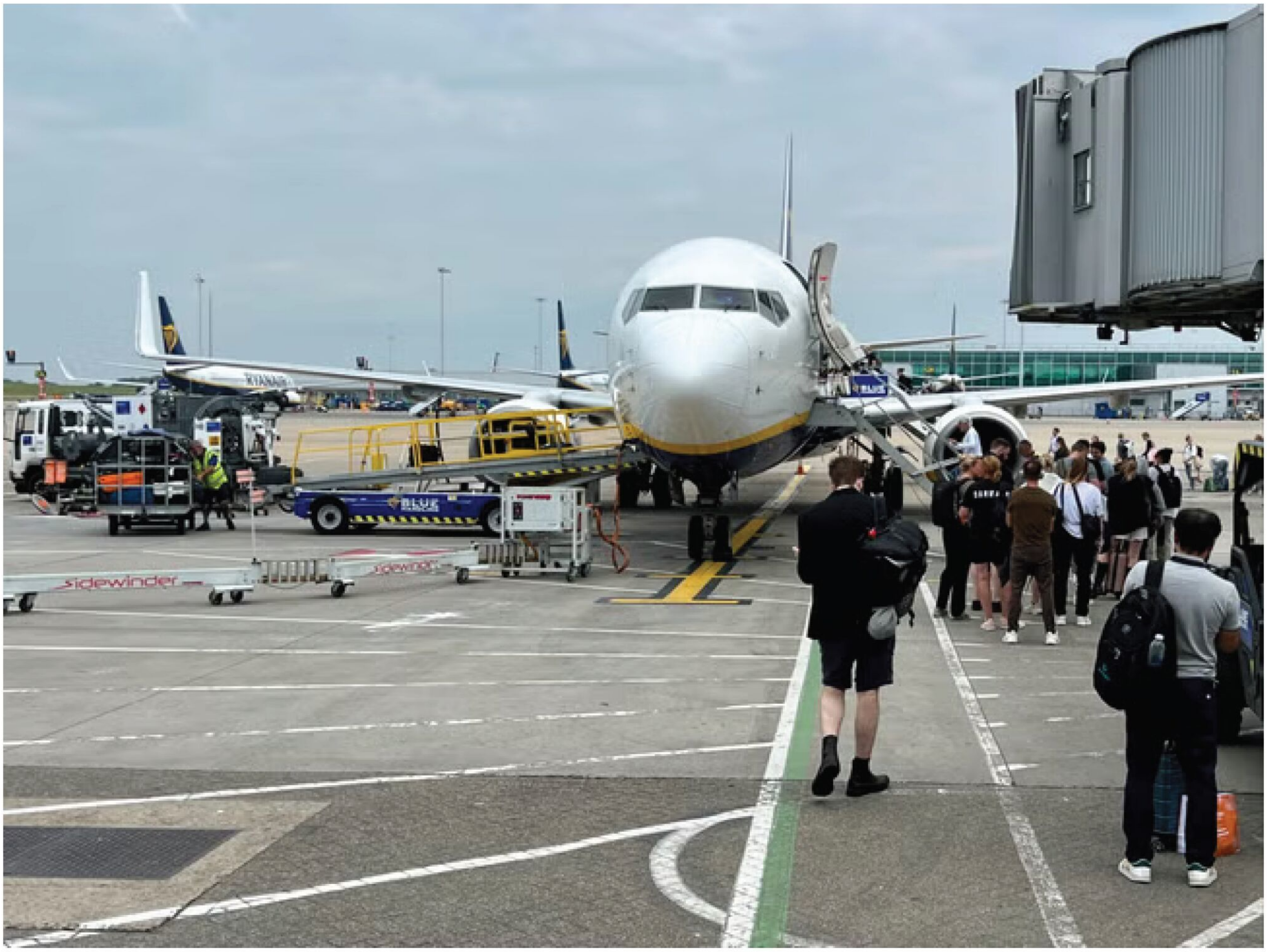
BACK TO TOP ^

CANCEL CULTURE

The UK's biggest airlines grounded hundreds of departures over three days while their rival carriers axed only a handful. **Simon Calder** on what sparked BA and easyJet's drastic move



Empty skies: boarding a Ryanair plane at London Stansted while flights were being grounded at the capital's biggest hubs (Simon Calder)

In west London, a noisy night for residents spells a profitable night for any taxi and Uber drivers who are prepared to work into the early hours. After midnight on Monday morning at

London Heathrow, a succession of planes touched down. Normally all arriving aircraft are tucked in by 11pm.

The tardy half-dozen were British Airways Airbus jets arriving well behind schedule from Dublin, Glasgow, Naples, Pisa, Porto and Prague. Around 900 weary passengers then trudged through the echoing terminal buildings, discovering that the Underground and rail lines had closed for the night. As the Heathrow stragglers sorted out their onward travel arrangements and possibly grimaced at the cost, across at Gatwick thousands of easyJet passengers were still waiting for the chance to fly.

On Sunday, easyJet had grounded more than 60 flights. They included a pair of departures to Cyprus, flights to various Greek islands and the 1,800-mile haul to Antalya. Monday's cancellations by Britain's biggest budget airline at its main base, London Gatwick, topped 40. Among the fallers: Lanzarote (again), Chania in Crete and Dalaman in Turkey.

After I wrote about the disruption to the travel plans of tens of thousands of BA and easyJet passengers, "Call me Frank" on Twitter asked: "Where does the fault stem from?"

Frank offered three possible explanations:

- Weather, some huge storms?
- Lack of aircraft or crew?
- Poor management/planning?

Let me tackle them in order.

Weather was the trigger. From a pilot's point of view, storms pose a serious threat. Aviation professionals are, I am glad to say, obsessed about safety. One very significant reason why UK and Irish airlines enjoy remarkable accident-free records is intolerance of risk. And that means avoiding cumulonimbus clouds of the kind that lashed the southern half of Britain on Sunday and Monday.

> **Weather disruption affects all airlines – but BA's Heathrow-based operation and easyJet's Gatwick network are especially susceptible**

Next, was there a lack of aircraft or crew? Evidently. An extended delay can turn into a cancellation if the crew reach their maximum duty times. Even if the trip goes ahead with a delay of, say, four hours, there are knock-on effects: strict rules on minimum rest for crew kick in; and a plane due to fly from A to B might still be on the ground in C.

You (or Frank) might counter: surely resource shortages are the result of poor management/planning? Both BA and easyJet are, in my view, well run.

The trouble is, resilience is expensive. Having large numbers of spare planes and crew on hand just in case may be a commendable goal, but it is unrealistic to expect an airline to be able seamlessly to recover from extreme weather disruption. Especially at Heathrow and Gatwick. And therein lies the real problem.

British Airways and easyJet are united in one characteristic: having their main bases at airports bursting at the air-traffic control seams.

BA's home at Heathrow is the busiest two-runway airport in the world. And Gatwick, where easyJet is the leading customer, is the busiest single-runway airport in the world, When schedules start to unravel, there is very little slack in the system. Weather disruption affects all airlines. But BA's Heathrow-based operation and easyJet's Gatwick network are especially susceptible.

Consider Aer Lingus, which flies to both Heathrow and Gatwick. Storms will clobber links to and from Dublin – but those flights represent a relatively small and manageable percentage of the Irish airline's operation. I saw only two non-BA cancellations on Tuesday from Heathrow.

For British Airways and easyJet, though, the scale of disruption is huge. So let me offer a fourth possibility: each airline has too many eggs in one vulnerable basket. But both carriers might say: we're just responding to customer demand. To reduce the risk of disruption, steer away from the most congested hubs – or at least the most dominant airlines. Ultimately, the passenger has the power.

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BACK TO TOP ^

Can you help me locate a chateau in Fontainebleau?

Room with a view: the Chateau de Fontainebleau was once frequented by Francis I (Getty)

Q A couple of months ago you gave tips on where to go in Fontainebleau. It was an old town and a chateau similar to Versailles. I can't remember the name of either. Can you help?

"The Real Thing"

A Fontainebleau is one of my tips for a good place to stay during the Paris Olympics in summer 2024 – with fast (40 minutes), frequent and low-cost trains to and from the French capital. The highlight is the Chateau de Fontainebleau, which seems to occupy half the town.

The French king Francis I loved the location, not least because of the hunting prospects in the surrounding forest, and in 1527 transformed a 12th-century medieval castle into an Italianate palace. As a royal residence, it pre-dates Versailles – and, being further from Paris, has smaller crowds.

After the French Revolution, the chateau became the Imperial Palace, much enjoyed by Napoleon Bonaparte; it houses the only Napoleonic throne room still in existence.

The town itself is nothing special, and you should not dawdle there. But while the forest may have less game than French royalty enjoyed, it is a blissful space to explore. The forest is said to be the world's first nature reserve, and is highly rated by rock climbers. Rent a bicycle for half a day to explore properly.

The optimal place to stay is the venerable and luxurious L'Aigle Noir, originally a 16th-century private mansion. On my last visit, though, I made do with the perfectly comfortable Ibis Budget hotel, close to the railway station. To dine, you can't go wrong with the convivial, tasty and good-value La Petite Ardoise bistrot, which focuses on local ingredients.

To complete the full chateaux experience, though, you should certainly follow Fontainebleau with Versailles, ending at Compiegne – a ravishing location northeast of Paris, and the palace that I enjoy the most.

Email your question to s@hols.tv or tweet @simoncalder

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BACK TO TOP ∧

CUTTING EDGE

Rachael Phillips on the top knife sets to sharpen your skills

A kitchen is never complete without a good set of kitchen knives. Whether the job calls for slicing, dicing, peeling or carving, a good knife is a must-have item. But with so many different knives on the market and each one possessing its own special purpose from the nimble paring knife to the versatile chef's knife, what knife to opt for can be a tough choice.

But that's where knife sets can help, they take the guesswork out of what blade you need by providing a range of basics as well as being more cost-effective than buying them individually. Whether you're a kitchen novice or seasoned pro, there are a few things you need to look out for when choosing a knife set. The size and shape of the handle is one big thing to take into account as you need to make sure it's comfortable to use and has a good grip.

Also what kind of storage it has is another, does it have a block or if loose, do the knives have sheaths to keep them protected in your drawer. Some knife sets even include in-built sharpening tools which are needed to maintain a sharp edge over time.

How we tested

When looking for the perfect knife set we chose ones that had at least three of the most basic knives you need in your kitchen: a chef's knife, pairing knife and bread knife. We tested each set over a three-week period putting it through its paces with a range of chopping and cutting tasks.

We chopped, sliced and peeled a range of items of varying toughness to really see how well these knives handled the job at hand. We also looked at how comfortable they were to use and how much space they took up in the kitchen.

BEST BUY
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INDEPENDENT

Kuhn Rikon colori+ 4PC set: £39.96, Kuhn Rikon

The Colori+ set includes four of the most used knives in the kitchen; a pairing knife, santoku knife, a chef's knife and a bread knife. Whilst there's no knife block, these knives do come with colour-matching sheaths to keep them safe and secure in your drawer. The blades are crafted from Japanese steel, which makes them super-sharp and long-lasting, plus, they have a non-stick coating to ensure that food does not get stuck to the blade and is easy to clean. They are also dishwasher-suitable, but hand washing is recommended if you want to extend the life of your knives.

The handles are what really makes these knives stand out though. They've been designed to be soft to touch and super comfortable to hold meaning you can cut and chop with precision. These knives come in various colours and you can buy them individually so it's easy to add to your collection.

Buy now

Robert Welch signature book oak knife block set with knife sharpener: £325, Amazon

The Robert Welch signature book oak knife block set combines great design with superb functionality. The set features six knives which are made using high-quality German stainless steel, making them extra durable and easy to clean. In fact, these knives are made to last, and with a lifetime guarantee, they are certainly worth the initial investment.

Each knife is lightweight and comfortable to handle, even when chopping through some of the toughest vegetables. The solid oak block is also another huge reason we chose this as our best overall knife set. The book block design is perfect for those who are precious about kitchen space as it sits flush against any wall. The knives are accessed from the front, making it ideal for storage under cupboards. Plus as an added extra, you get a signature hand-held knife sharpener which is compact enough to sit inside your cutlery drawer and ensures it's easy to keep your knives sharp.

Buy now

VINERS
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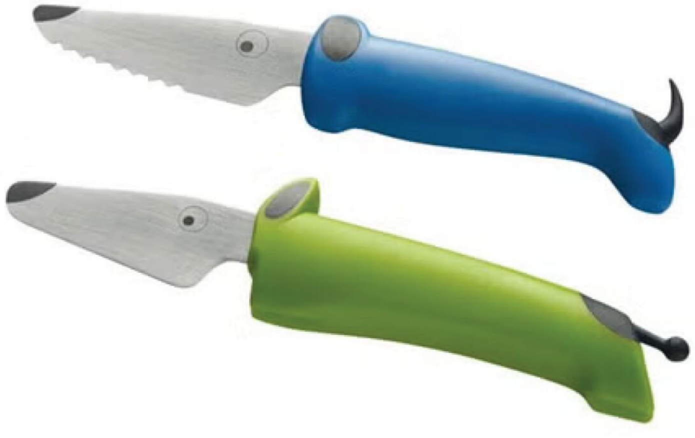
VINERS
VINERS

Viners assure 4 piece knife set: £13, Dunelm

Viners have proven that you don't need to spend a lot of money to enjoy a good quality knife set. This set of four has everything you could possibly need for everyday meal prep. It includes a chef's knife, santoku knife, utility knife and pairing knife. Crafted from high-quality stainless steel, rust-resistant and covered in a black non-stick coating to reduce cutting friction, these knives have been tempered to keep the edges super sharp even after heavy use.

The handles make these knives a joy to use; they're soft to touch and ergonomically designed for a better grip. These knives also have a squared tip which maximises safety without compromising on performance. The set comes with a 10-year guarantee and for the price, we don't think you can beat it. Plus, if you'd like to add to your collection by including a bread or carving knife, then you can purchase them separately.

Buy now



Kuhn Rikon kinderkitchen set of 2: £13.95, Amazon

It's never too early to learn kitchen skills, and these knives are perfect for children aged three and over. These knives are crafted from quality Japanese stainless steel, and while they're not as sharp as adult knives, they will cut most fruit and vegetables. We really love the fun dog design which also doubles up as a safety feature, with the ears acting as a hand guard to keep fingers away from the cutting surface and the tail steadying the hand with soft poke-free plastic. There are two knives in this set, a straight-edge blade and a serrated blade; they are lightweight and durable, so kids can get used to handling knives in the kitchen while remaining safe.

Buy now

ProCook Nihon X50 knife set: £169, ProCook

If you want a knife set that looks good on display as well as performs exceptionally well then the Nihon X50 Knife Set from ProCook fits the bill. This set of five knives comes with a magnetic walnut knife block that you'd be proud to have on display, not to mention its space-saving functions. The knives are crafted using German X50 stainless steel and infused with carbon for a strong, sharp blade that will last. The carbonised ash wood handles are really comfortable to handle, and even if you have damp hands, they retain a good grip.

Buy now

Joseph Joseph duo 5 piece knife block set: £54, Habitat

This five-piece knife set has everything you need to be able to meal prep in style. The blades are made using high-quality Japanese stainless steel which makes them super sharp and durable. The non-slip pinch grip on the handle allows for better handling, and they just feel very safe and secure when in use. The knife block is slimline and ideal if you're lacking space, with easy access slots for the knives to effortlessly slip into. Another thing we love about these knives is that they come colour coded, so you can quickly grab which knife is right for the job without having to pull each one out to check if it's what you need.

Buy now

Designpro titanium knife set with clear flared acrylic block: £49, ProCook

This stylish set has a great range of knives that will cover all your cutting jobs. It includes a 3.5in paring knife, 5in utility knife, 7in santoku knife, 7in chef’s knife, 8in carving knife and an 8in bread knife. The knives can be easily stored in the clear acrylic block, making selecting the one you need very easy.

The blades are made using stainless steel but have been coated with titanium, making them ultra-sharp and durable. The handles are made from soft-grip silicone, so they feel comfortable when used. These knives also look really nice, as they come in a stylish grey colour. The acrylic block is practical and can stand flush against walls, so it won’t take up much space.

When testing, we found all these knives cut really well, but the santoku was especially useful, as it could be used for every kitchen job.

Buy now

Joseph Joseph elevate store five-piece knife set with in-drawer storage tray: £70, Amazon

If you don’t like your knives on display but you want to keep them tidy, this set is perfect. They ship in a special drawer tray, so you can keep all the knives in place and the blades protected without taking up countertop space. There are five knives in this set, including a 3.5in paring knife, 4.5in serrated knife, 5.5in santoku knife, 6.5in chef’s knife and an 8in bread knife. They’re made from durable high-carbon stainless steel, so won’t rust or discolour after prolonged use.

These knives handle really well – the handles are weighted, so they don’t feel flimsy when you’re chopping something tough. We also love how the shape of the handles means, when you place these knives down, the blades don’t touch the work surface. That’s because they use special elevate technology, which improves hygiene and reduces mess – and that’s always going to be a winner in our books.

Buy now

ProCook Japanese knife set: £20, ProCook

This set of four Japanese knives is great for any budding chef. It includes a 7in vegetable slicer, 6.5in chef's knife, 6.5in santoku knife and an 8in carving knife. The blades are made using high-quality stainless steel, which stays super sharp and effortlessly cuts through different ingredients.

The carved wood handles are really nice to hold, although they can feel a bit loose after prolonged use. The knives can't be used in the dishwasher, and it's essential to keep the blades dry after washing, so they'll last.

These are really good knives if you're into making Japanese cuisine, as the range is perfect for meat, fish and vegetable dishes such as sushi. They're also very light, so you don't need to put much effort into chopping. The blades have integrated holes, meaning food doesn't get stuck, which is a nice touch.

Buy now

Ninja food staysharp knife block: £169.99, Ninja

Ninja products seem to be the staple of any kitchen at the moment, especially with the brand's range of air fryers, but this knife block with built-in sharper definitely deserves high praise. Constructed from forged German stainless steel, these knives have been made to last. This set includes an 8in chef's knife, 8in bread knife, 8in slicing knife, 5in utility knife and a 3.5in paring knife, so there really is something for every job.

The brilliant thing about this set is that the block comes with a built-in sharper on the side, which means you'll always have super-sharp knives with little effort. Now, this is quite a hefty block, so you'll need to have enough kitchen counter space, but if you can carve out the space, it's well worth it.

During testing, we found these knives really easy to use. They had a good grip, felt light, and the super-sharp blades glided through everything we cut. The chef's knife was particularly impressive, handling hard fruits and vegetables, such as melon and celeriac, with utter ease. Sharpening the knives was also a really easy task – the knife just needed to be inserted into the sharpening slot and a few pulls of the lever left them super sharp. Ninja states these knives will stay sharp for up to 10 years with regular sharpening.

Buy now

The verdict

A good set of knives go a long way to enjoyable food prep. The colori+ four-piece set covers every base. They are super sharp and really nice to handle. They come with matching knife sheaths so they’re safe to store in the cutlery draw.

The signature book oak knife block set by Robert Welch also ticked all our boxes. The solid oak knife block sits flush against any wall making it ideal for those who have smaller kitchens or don’t want to lose valuable counter space. It also comes with a good selection of knives to cover a range of chopping jobs.

For those on a budget, the viners assure four-piece knife set is perfect. These knives stay sharp even after a lot of use and they’re lightweight and comfortable to work with.

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BACK TO TOP ^

Riders on the storm

A line-up of Blur, Kendrick Lamar and Rosalia is peerless but Primavera Porto's execution (and the weather) is out of step with one of the world's best festivals, writes **Ben Bryant**

Damon Albarn does his best to bring some energy back into the arena after a downpour (Hugo Lima)

★★★☆☆

The smallest sibling of the Primavera Sound superbrand, Porto's edition of the music festival sometimes feels as if it receives the headliner hand-me-downs of its Barcelona brother.

This year, there's Blur, Halsey, Kendrick Lamar, Fred Again and Spanish superstar Rosalia – but Portugal misses out on a sprinkling of the big names who performed in Spain only days earlier, including Calvin Harris, Depeche Mode, and Christine and the Queens. To add insult to injury, all of those artists are on the bill for a third Primavera festival this year – the newcomer Primavera Madrid, which celebrates its first-ever outing the same weekend.

Madrid's debut turns to disaster on 8 June when "severe" weather forces organisers to cancel the opening day. Thankfully, Porto avoids the same fate – but notably, not the torrential rain. There are other unfortunate glitches, not least a power failure during headliners New Order, interrupting a weekend that otherwise mostly delivers on its promise.

Wednesday's headliner Kendrick Lamar is a spectacular live performer, although not the kind who spends much time interacting with the crowd. The rapper's set list spans 2011's woozy "ADHD" and 2012's propulsive "m.A.A.d city", plus covers of Pusha T's "Nosetalgia" and The Weeknd's "Sidewalks". It's a crowd-pleasing concoction and one that would be even more pleasurable if we got a bit more from Lamar himself, especially given that his performance coincides with the most punishing downpour of the weekend, sucking the energy (and a decent chunk of the crowd) from the festival site.

The following day brings better weather and, in fact, when the storm does return, it adds some drama to Fred Again's set during which the rainfall peaks amid the driving bassline of "Rumble". Perhaps it's the water or maybe it's his enthusiastic delivery, but Fred's pad controller breaks midway through his set, leaving him punching madly at buttons like a tweaking velociraptor, as samples fail to land in time. A replacement is quickly found.

©HUGO LIMA | PSPorto'20

Why does it always rain on me? Festivalgoers wear raincoats and hooded jackets (Hugo Lima)

Thursday’s headliner Rosalia is, by some margin, the highlight of the weekend. She is an innovative artist who manages to produce a pop vision that is at once so singular, confident, kooky, warm and feminine that it is strikingly out of step with her peers. On stage with her is an extremely zealous Steadicam operator who she pulls around like a giant hi-res selfie stick, beaming down the lens hypnotically. Whether she’s swooning on the piano in huge single “Hentai” or riding in circles with her scooter gang for “Chicken Teriyaki”, nobody is having more fun.

By Friday, the rain eases and the tension fades. Pusha T is known on record for possessing one of the coldest deliveries around, but his set is a total crowd-pleaser. The rapper flits from the 21-year-old Neptunes hit “Grindin’”, taken from his Clipse days, to the Future single “Move That Dope”, and even a verse from Kanye West’s “Runaway”.

The stage is set for the Pet Shop Boys, who walk the line between cringe and cool better than anyone in pop. Tonight they are sensational, with outfit changes that include an iridescent mirrored anorak and a volley of singalong hits including “Can You Forgive Her?”, “Where The Streets Have No Name” and “Left to My Own Devices”. The two Nineties suburb-style lamp posts that bathe their heads in an orange glow for “West End Girls” are by far the best prop of the weekend.

On Saturday, it is New Order who experience the festival's second calamity – a power outage during one of the headline act's most famous songs. The cutoff in "True Faith" is so perfectly timed that the audience don't seem to realise at first. "Shit happens," shrugs Bernard Sumner, when he finally gets power to his mic back. "Never mind." The music cuts again once more before the band are back on track, but it's hard not to shake the feeling that momentum has been lost, as a large chunk of the crowd decamps to watch Blur.

Damon Albarn seems to be doing his best to bring some energy back into the arena. To the abrasive boinging of the opening riff on "Popscene", he bounds around the stage pumping his fist with a dynamism belying his 55 years. Alex James smokes his signature cigarette. It's a nostalgic set of no-nonsense and no filler that includes "There's No Other Way", "Girls and Boys", "Coffee and TV", "Song 2" and the soaring "This is a Low". Blur are always resilient and dynamic live performers but you get the sense that some of their biggest hits are now tough for them to swallow. "You must have done something terrible in your former lives to deserve this song," laughs Albarn, launching into "Country House".

Primavera Porto is a marvellous festival when things go well, but there is one more thing that regrettably needs to be said. With its late-night headliners and limited shelter, this is an event optimised for sunshine. I am no irrigation expert, but I am far from the only one to notice that the rainfall streaming downhill from the tarmac to the grass of the main stage has mingled unappealingly with piss. By Friday, the main stage has marinated into a muddy bayou that wafts zephyrs of ammonia through the crowd. The toilets are finally closed on Sunday night, but a fishy odour hangs in the air throughout Blur's set.

Primavera's line-up remains peerless, but this execution was a little out of step for what is considered by many to be the highlight of the entire global festival season. It's possible the team were spread too thin by their transition to three events and caught out by the surprise weather. Whatever the case, the only fish in this port should be served in a Caldeirada.

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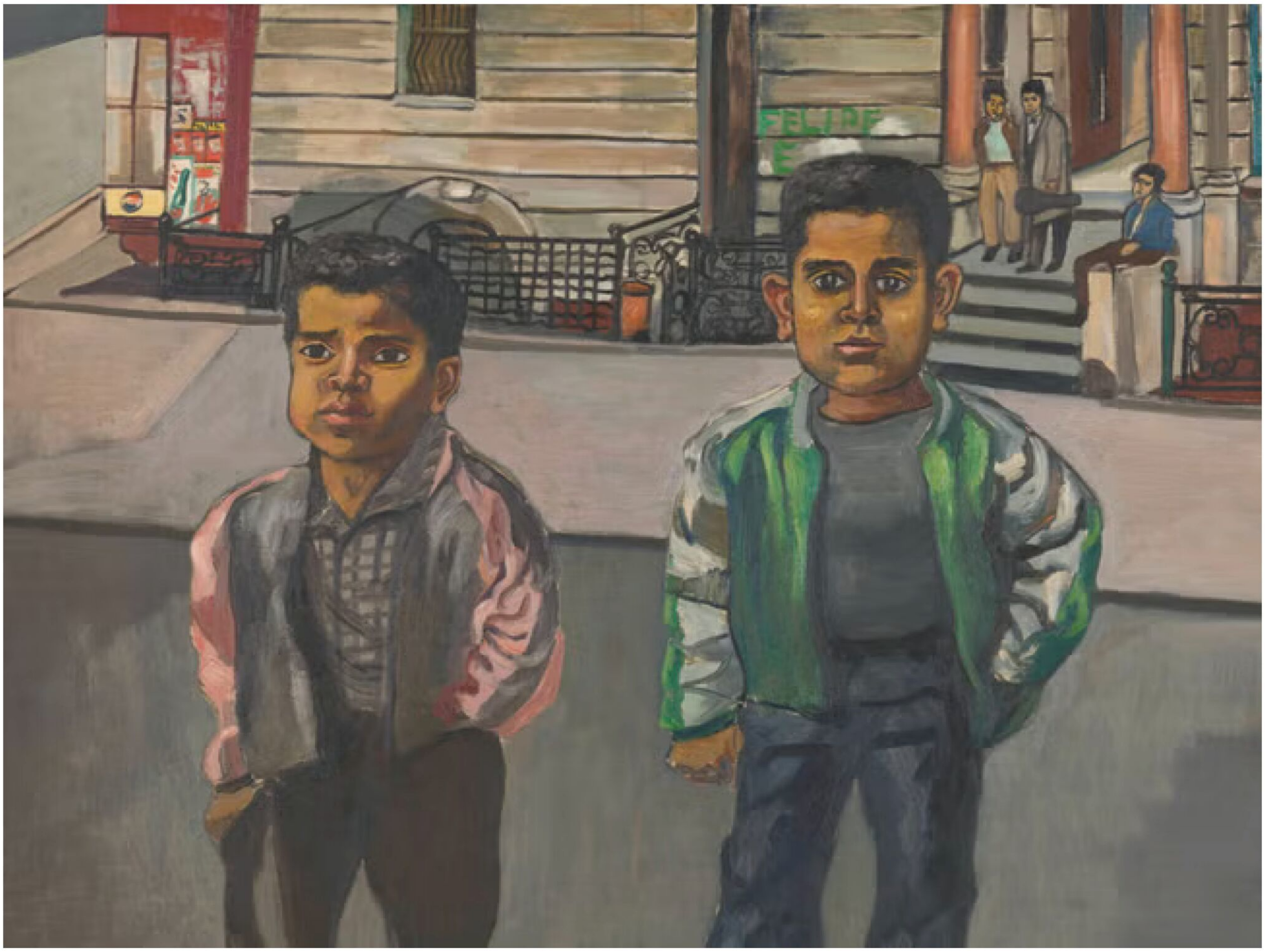
BACK TO TOP ^

Underdeveloped show pits paint against photography

‘Capturing the Moment’ is full of big hitters – Freud, Bacon, Hockney – but lacks a clear message, writes **Mark Hudson**



Alice Neel’s ‘Dominican Boys on 108th Street’ (The Estate of Alice Neel/Tate)

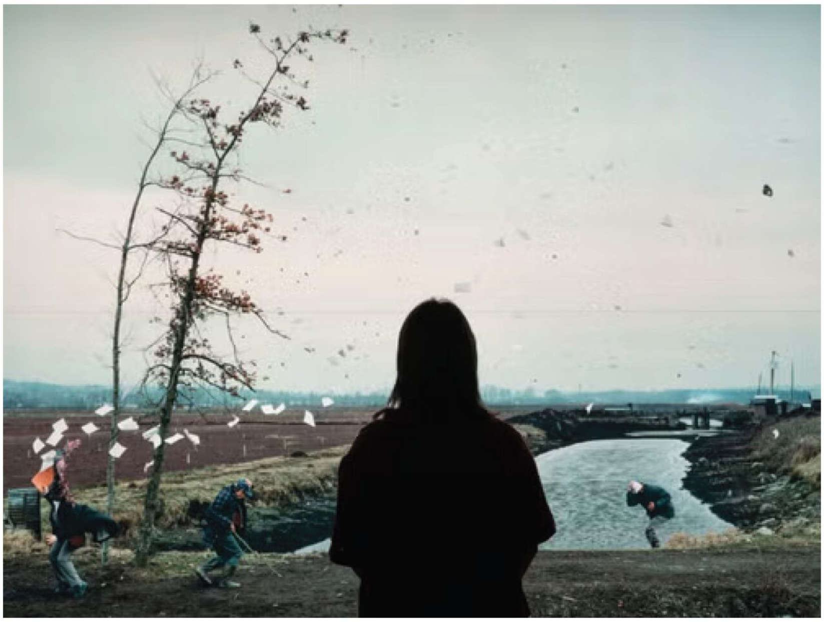
★★☆☆☆

Tate Modern, London

Painting is supposedly undergoing a renaissance but there's barely an artist working today who doesn't employ photography in one form or another. Indeed, in our photo-tweaking, Instagram-posting, image-manipulating times, painting has become, it could be argued, a mere by-product of photography.

This potentially hugely vexed field provides fertile ground for a major Tate exhibition, exploring the "dynamic relationship between contemporary painting and photography". Capturing the Moment draws substantially on the collection of the Yageo Foundation, created by the Taiwanese electronics giant, which famously bought David Hockney's *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* for $89m – then the most expensive painting by a living artist – in 2018. The show puts modern master paintings by the likes of Francis Bacon, Gerhard Richter and Peter Doig into "dialogue" with recent acquisitions by younger artists from the Tate's own collection.

With the stage set for a really prickly and entertainingly rivalrous encounter between the two mediums, it's surprising to find ourselves looking at paintings by Lucian Freud – an artist who prided himself on only painting directly from life – as we enter the show. The title of the room, however, gives the thinking behind the display and, indeed, the entire show, away: Painting in the Time of Photography. Since all painting has been somehow touched by an awareness of the possibilities of photography since the mid-19th century advent of the medium, the exhibition seems to regard just about any painting created since 1830 as within its remit. Freud's poignant *The Painter's Mother IV* (1973) is justified on the grounds of its downward-pointing – and arguably photographically inspired – angle over her crumpled features.



Jeff Wall's 'A Sudden Gust of Wind' (Tate/Larina Fernandes)

Dorothea Lange's iconic photograph *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (1936), showing a drawn and exhausted Depression-era mother cradling her child, is put into conversation with Picasso's *Weeping Woman* painted a year later in response to the Spanish civil war, and Alice Neel's cloyingly faux-naif *Dominican Boys on 108th Street* (1955). While it would be nice to report that a signature work by one of the greatest painters of the 20th century has far greater truth than a mere photograph, the harrowing veracity of Lange's image makes the Picasso look facile and kicks the Neel right out of the gallery.

This though is the only directly competitive moment in the entire exhibition. Rather than develop a strong central argument, the show seems content to point out the differences, similarities, angles and echoes between works to frequently inconclusive and sometimes blindingly obvious effect.

A room called Tensions, for example, is manifestly lacking in tension. Francis Bacon is one of painting's great users and abusers of photography. But *Study for a Pope VI*, one of a series based on a photograph of Velazquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, isn't a great example of his ability to "emotionally charge… every brushstroke", as the wall texts have it.

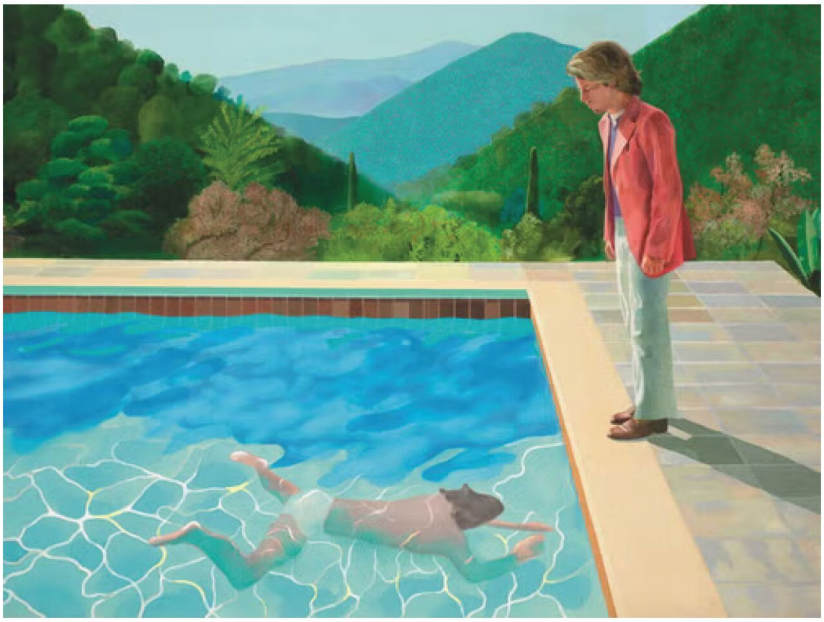
In the same room, Paula Rego's *War* (2003), a melee of sinister rabbit-headed figures based on a snap of a terrified woman carrying a baby during the Iraq war, would make more sense if the photograph were shown alongside. Georg Baselitz's trademark "upside down" painting *Orange Eater II* (1981) seems unconnected to photography, but it's a nice work from the Yageo collection, so, hey, why not include it?

> **It feels as though a large body of works were made available from one of the world's major collections, and a rationale hastily developed around them**

When it comes to photography influenced by painting, the exhibition spends far too much time telling us what we already know. Seen on a wall-filling light box in a darkened room, Jeff Wall's *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (1993)has a truly cinematic impact. Four wind-blown figures run after flyaway scraps of paper in an image derived from an 1831 woodblock print by the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai. Yet the fact that the image, with its photoshopped figures and paper undercuts our perceptions of photography as a "faithful" capturing of a single moment, will come as a revelation to no one. While many gallery-goers still struggle with some of the basic premises of modern art, the infinite malleability of photography is something everybody these days just gets. For once the public understanding feels ahead of the curators' rhetoric.

German painter Gerhard Richter's blurry photorealist paintings are generally considered some of the most intelligent explorations of the boundaries of painting and photography, though their clever-clever appeal has always passed me by. Is that actually two candles in *Two Candles* (1982) or one candle and its reflection in a mirror? Do we care? He's quoted on the wall as saying "the most banal amateur photograph is more interesting than the most beautiful painting by Cezanne". Fair point, but I'd have been happier if he'd made that, "the most beautiful painting by Gerhard Richter".

But that Hockney painting, *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (1972), used as the show's poster image, makes a far stronger impact than I expected. Showing Hockney's long-time boyfriend Peter Schlesinger, from whom he had recently separated, looking pensively down at another young man in a Californian swimming pool, the large-scale painting might have felt a touch sentimental, even cheesy. Certainly, the contrast of realistically rendered figure and abstracted water feels Hockneyesque to an almost cliched degree. Yet there's an authentically tragic note in the merging of past and present in a composition Hockney assembled from a collection of random personal snaps. I'd almost forgotten he could do paintings this good.



David Hockney's 1972 'Portrait of an Artist' (David Hockney Photo Art Gallery of New South Wales/Jenni Carter)

Around this we're given an interesting, but oddly arbitrary selection of works, including a wall full of grade-A Pop Art – though some of the best pieces are from Tate's own collection. Peter Doig is so much the great photographically-inspired painter of our times that including his *Canoe Lake* (1997) feels almost gratuitous. American painter John Currin, who I generally can't stand, provides the quirkily sinister *Thanksgiving* (2003), in which three versions of his long-necked wife cook the turkey.

While there's little outright copying of photographs – and oddly almost no photorealism – in the show, there's the sense that art today is about synthesising and curating existing stuff, from iPhone images and works of art to just about everything you can imagine from everyday life. The idea of creating original form, whether through imagination or observation, feels long gone. The most notable exceptions to this come, hearteningly, in the final room with Laura Owens's near-abstract post-internet paintings and Christina Quarles's wacky digitally-derived figures that look at times as though they're stretched out of chewing gum.

These, though, are a mere aside in a show that takes us on a pleasant enough amble through a lot of mostly excellent recent paintings and photography, without providing a strong argument – or indeed any real argument – for why we're there. It feels as though a large body of works were made available from one of the world's major collections, and a rationale hastily developed around them. In these straitened, post-Covid times, that must present an appealingly cost-effective way of mounting an exhibition; though looking at the ticket prices, the savings aren't being passed on to the viewer. It doesn't bode well for the future.

Until 28 January 2024

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BACK TO TOP ^

Landlords may quit housing sector as boom years end

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Research indicates that average net profits for landlords are at their lowest since 2007 (Getty)

VICKY SHAW

There is a "very real risk" of landlords quitting, a property firm is warning, as it said 2023 marks a turning point following a boom period for those investing in the buy-to-let sector.

Savills' research indicated that average net profits for landlords are at their lowest since 2007. Investors' average net profits fell below 4 per cent on average in the first quarter of this year, marking a dramatic shift in finances for mortgaged buy-to-let buyers, it said.

Lucian Cook, head of residential research at Savills, said: "Following a boom period for buy-to-let landlords, 2023 marks a turning point for Britain's private rented sector. Between 2014 and 2021, landlords on average were making 'year one' cash profits of 23 per cent of rental income, but successive interest rate hikes have seen this figure plummet to under 4 per cent this year."

He added: "There is a very real risk that landlords will exit the sector, particularly those with high levels of borrowing, putting increased pressure on a sector where demand significantly outweighs supply in many locations." Mr Cook continued: "Future investment is now likely to be dominated by cash buyers and those with low borrowing requirements."

Many landlords who have been active since buy-to-let took off in the early 2000s are now nearing or in retirement, which also risks limiting the future supply of rental stock, Savills said. Hikes in the Bank of England base rate have been pushing up borrowing costs generally and expectations over inflation are also having an impact on mortgage rates.

Figures released yesterday showed that average regular wages, not including bonuses, jumped 7.2 per cent higher in the three months to April, up from 6.8 per cent in the three months to March and higher than expected. Experts have said the figures would raise the chances of another base rate hike next week. They also said the renewed pick-up in wage growth in April will add fuel to a recent rise in gilt yields.

Mortgage lenders have already been temporarily restricting the availability of mortgage deals and hiking rates as financial markets now believe interest rates may need to rise from 4.5 per cent currently to 5.5 per cent or even higher.

Shadow Treasury minister Pat McFadden warned yesterday that UK's homeowners "are under increasing financial stress". He said: "This isn't just about homeowners, it's about renters too because the landlords that they rent from are also facing increased borrowing costs, and that in turn is forcing up rents."

Answering an urgent question from Labour on recent developments in the mortgage market, economic secretary to the Treasury, Andrew Griffith, told MPs: "Given inflation is the number-one enemy, we're focused on delivering the prime minister's pledge to halve it this year, nevertheless I know mortgage rates and the availability of mortgages are a concern right now. Mortgage arrears and repossessions remain below pre-pandemic levels and if a borrower falls into financial difficulty guidance from the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) requires firms to offer tailored support and to deal with customers fairly."

On Monday, Santander announced a temporary pause on some mortgage applications, amid "changing market conditions". The bank plans to relaunch a full range of mortgage products today. On Thursday last week, HSBC UK made the decision to temporarily withdraw mortgage rates available via broker services, to help to ensure the bank could stay within its operational capacity.

Its mortgages are now back on sale through brokers, although its rates have increased by between 0.10 percentage points and 0.45 percentage points. Across the mortgage market, average fixed-rate mortgage rates have been moving close to 6 per cent. According to financial information website Moneyfacts, the average two-year fixed-rate mortgage on the market was 5.90 per cent yesterday, while the average five-year fixed-rate was 5.55 per cent.

PA

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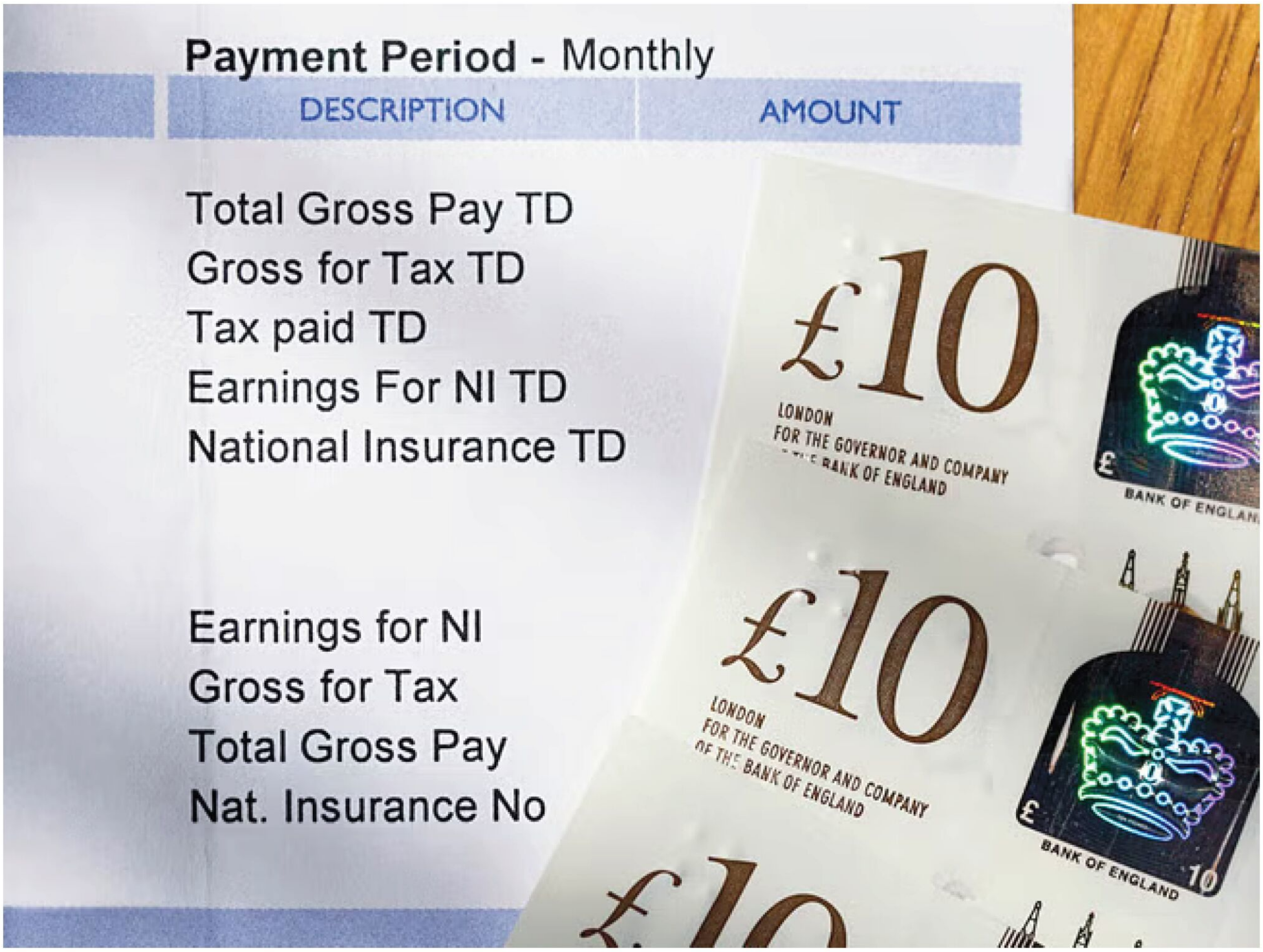
BACK TO TOP ^

Business/ **Inside Business**

Accelerating wages won’t stop people getting poorer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With inflation continuing to run hot, people’s pockets are still empty (Getty)

JAMES MOORE
CHIEF BUSINESS COMMENTATOR

Wages are rising at a surprisingly rapid pace, according to the latest official labour market release from the Office for National Statistics. At 7.2 per cent, excluding bonuses, this is the biggest number in 20 years outside the pandemic period (the rate was 7.3 per cent between April and June 2021).

Good news for workers? Only up to a point. With inflation continuing to run hot – 8.7 per cent in the 12 months to April – signs of wages closing the gap ought to be welcomed, but in real terms, wages are still falling. Adjusted for inflation, pay fell by 1.3 per cent annually for the February-to-April reporting period (this particular dataset uses a three-month term). When bonuses are included, pay fell by 2 per cent.

Remember too that inflation has different effects depending on where you sit on the wage scale. Food prices are rising at close to 20 per cent; this hits those at the bottom harder because food makes up a higher proportion of their household budgets.

A chunky rise in what the government describes as the national living wage (accurately described as the minimum wage) was a big contributor to the overall number. The hourly rates moved up to £10.42 in April for those aged 23 and over, a near 10 per cent increase. But even that likely won't be enough to cover the personal inflation rates of minimum wage employees, largely because of those food prices.

"Family budgets can't take any more pressure," said TUC general secretary Paul Nowak. "It's no wonder workers are reluctantly taking strike action to defend their living standards. They've been backed into a corner and pushed to breaking point."

Nowak is not wrong; Britons are getting poorer, fast. This has been the case for well over a year. Those who borrow are about to get poorer still.

> **Family budgets can’t take any more pressure. It’s no wonder workers are reluctantly taking strike action to defend their living standards. They’ve been backed into a corner and pushed to breaking point**

The Bank of England will see nothing good in these figures. Huw Pill, its chief economist, recently created a storm he said this in a podcast interview: “Somehow in the UK, someone needs to accept that they’re worse off and stop trying to maintain their real spending power by bidding up prices, whether higher wages or passing energy costs through on to customers.”

His choice of words was criticised by governor Andrew Bailey. But Bailey himself once cautioned people against seeking higher pay rises. Pill may have been guilty of no more than saying the quiet part out loud. The rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee, of which they are both members, simply has to get inflation under control. But there is a debate to be had about these numbers – namely, whether they really provide evidence of the 1970s wage-price spiral that the Bank fears.

Higher wages certainly have an inflationary impact. But there are other factors behind Brtiain’s stubbornly high rate. Food prices, which have started to replace energy as the chief culprit, are influenced by factors mostly outside of the bank’s control, including the war in Ukraine, Brexit, poor harvests in Spain and so on.

Part of the reason underlying core inflation, which excludes food and energy, is proving stubborn is down not to the greed, or rather the needs, of workers but of their bosses. The phenomenon of “greedflation” – companies forcing through price rises not because of higher wage bills but to boost their margins – is clearly playing a role.

The MPC has nonetheless made its views clear; it sees high wage rises as a problem. Sterling was up sharply in response to the figures and parts of the City have started to bet on a bumper 0.5 point rate rise at the next MPC meeting, speculation which these figures will fuel. A rise of 0.25 points feels more likely, on a split vote, but the higher number can’t be ruled out.

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

Business news in brief

The company behind restaurant chain Yo! Sushi has been bought by one of Japan’s biggest food companies in a deal worth almost half a billion pounds (PA)

Yo! Sushi owner sold to Japanese food giant in £500m deal

The business behind restaurant chain Yo! Sushi has been bought by one of Japan’s biggest food companies in a deal worth almost half a billion pounds. Mayfair Equity Partners said it sold its stake in Snowfox Group to Zensho Holdings for £494m. The deal sees the Japanese giant gain a company that owns several brands in the UK, the US and Canada. In Britain, it runs Yo! Sushi, which has more than 100 outlets in the country, as well as Taiko, which produces Japanese “food to go” for British supermarkets. In the US, the company founded the Snowfox chain of sushi kiosks in 2005, and in Canada, the business runs sushi brand Bento. *PA*

Concern over 'short notice' of self-assessment helpline changes

A senior MP has raised concerns about the decision to close off HMRC's main self-assessment helpline over the summer. The agency announced last week it will pilot a new "seasonal model" for the helpline, to help free up advisers to answer urgent calls on other lines and answer customer correspondence; it will direct self-assessment queries to webchat instead. The helpline will reopen on 4 September. Harriett Baldwin, chair of the treasury committee, has written to HMRC to ask several questions, including whether the move has been prompted by staffing issues in the department, or backlogs or issues in other areas. She has also asked whether the closure of the helpline is related to HMRC's homeworking policy. *PA*

Banks making life harder for disabled customers

More than half (52 per cent) of bank customers with disabilities feel that branch closures have negatively affected their ability to access vital banking services, according to a Which? survey. The consumer group carried out research among more than 2,700 bank customers with disabilities. Which? said financial firms have a legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure customers are not excluded. More than a third (35 per cent) surveyed find it fairly or very difficult to speak to their bank over the phone, while more than one in five (21 per cent) struggle with security features such as card readers or remembering passwords. New security checks for online card payments, known as strong customer authentication, also proved problematic for just under two-fifths (39 per cent) of those surveyed. *PA*

Bellway set for lower volumes and selling prices

Housebuilder Bellway has said volumes are expected to dip this year and in 2024 as bosses cautioned over the potential further impact of cost of living pressures and higher interest rates. The FTSE 250 reported a “sustained improvement” in demand over the spring but the reservation rate for the four months to 4 June was down around a quarter, 24.9 per cent, against the same period last year. It added that it has accelerated the construction of social homes over the period, which has partially offset the dip in private demand. Bellway said it is currently “on track” to deliver around 11,000 homes over the year to July with an average selling price of around £300,000, compared with 11,198 in the previous year and an average price of £314,399. *PA*

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

A midfield merry-go-round will define summer window

Middle men: Declan Rice, Alexis Mac Allister, Jude Bellingham and Mason Mount (Getty)

RICHARD JOLLY
SENIOR FOOTBALL CORRESPONDENT

It was not the first time Youri Tielemans had made headlines on the day of a major final. A couple of years after he decided the FA Cup with a superlative strike against Chelsea came something that was rather less of a bolt from the blue – his move to Aston Villa, which became fact a few hours before the Champions League final kicked off.

A few days earlier came confirmation of a rather costlier move: Jude Bellingham's transfer from Borussia Dortmund to Real Madrid. Before the transfer window had officially opened, it was announced that Alexis Mac Allister was bound for Liverpool. European finals occurred amid thoughts of goodbyes and to a backdrop of uncertainty. No sooner had West Ham won the Conference League than chairman David Sullivan admitted what was long known: that Declan Rice will leave, providing an appropriate offer comes in. There is the possibility that either the out-of-contract Ilkay Gundogan or Bernardo Silva will bow out of Manchester City having won the Champions League in his valedictory appearance.

They could form part of what looks like being a massive midfield merry-go-round. If transfers are a staple of every summer, and discussions about them seemingly a global fixation, 2023 should appear particularly busy in the centre of the pitch.

Others seen in the Premier League this season who are either definitely or at least quite likely to be swapping clubs include Mason Mount, Mateo Kovacic, N'Golo Kante, Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Granit Xhaka, Moises Caicedo, Romeo Lavia, James Ward-Prowse, James Maddison, James Milner, Naby Keita, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Tyler Adams, Scott McTominay, Fred, Jefferson Lerma, Joao Moutinho and Ruben Neves. That is before factoring in others whose departures might not be a genuine shock, a group that could include Conor Gallagher, Amadou Onana, Kalvin Phillips, Wilfred Ndidi and Brenden Aaronson, while Tottenham have their annual problem of what to do with Tanguy Ndombele and Giovani Lo Celso. And, given the Premier League's status as huge net importers, there is every chance of arrivals from abroad. Borussia Dortmund's Mo Dahoud seems likely to replace Mac Allister at Brighton. Borussia Monchengladbach's Manu Kone and Nice's Khephren Thuram are potential targets for others.

A host of reasons are colliding, and not merely because high-level players are less likely to look for upheaval in tournament summers, making this probably busier than 2024. If there is the usual wish to upgrade, it is particularly pronounced at several clubs. Liverpool delayed their midfield rebuild, paid a price and only exacerbated their need for reinforcements. Erik ten Hag began overhauling Manchester United's midfield last year but it was always envisaged he would want at least one signing there this summer. Arsenal's swift improvement in the rest of the team highlighted the midfield as an area where, despite Xhaka's best season in London, they could be better and Rice would appear better. Newcastle's transformation into a Champions League club can bring a necessity to find alternatives, and potential superiors, to Eddie Howe's worthy workhorses, Sean Longstaff and Joe Willock. Maybe Ange Postecoglou will want to give Tottenham an injection of creativity.

(North) London calling: Rice, a Europa Conference League winner with West Ham, is wanted by Arsenal (PA)

Then there is also a phenomenon that has been apparent for a while: it may be a sign of the Premier League's strength in depth or a failing on the part of some of the superpowers that some of the outstanding midfielders have not been at the supposed big six. Rice may be the most expensive example but the Brighton double act of Mac Allister and Caicedo, who attracted January bids from Arsenal and Chelsea, are other cases in point. Neves has been a player with enviable class who has shown admirable loyalty to Wolves but has been open in his desire for Champions League football.

Indeed, one of the division's dynamics this season, which in turn should speed up the revolving door of midfielders, is the relegation of sides with quality performers. The precocious Lavia never seemed likely to stay at Southampton for long but Ward-Prowse, whose consistency and set-piece delivery had drawn bids before, could have been a Saints lifer had they stayed up forever. Likewise, it is hard to envisage Adams in the Championship with Leeds. Their contractual situations may have meant Leicester would have always lost Maddison and Tielemans but demotion reduces their bargaining power for the Englishman.

The Belgian belongs in two categories. Some of the midfield business comes because an unusually high number of talents are available on free transfers. Gundogan could be the most prominent of them, unless City persuade their captain to re-sign. Liverpool's frustration with the injuries of Keita and Oxlade-Chamberlain meant neither was offered deals.

Then there is Kante, who is also part of another cause: Chelsea's great disruptors, committed to inexplicable revolution. Todd Boehly and co may be taking a wrecking ball to a Champions League-winning team without intending to. Kante highlights the sudden emergence of supersized offers from Saudi Arabia as a new element in the market. But if Kovacic goes, it will be in part because Chelsea have contrived to alienate their existing players with their incessant focus on the new. If Mount and Gallagher are sold, they are enforced moves to try and balance the books – especially for Financial Fair Play regulations – after ludicrous spending. Meanwhile, of course, Chelsea will carry on bidding: indeed if most of Kante, Kovacic, Loftus-Cheek, Gallagher and Mount depart, they could somehow end up short of midfielders and needing to spend again, a few months after paying £107m for Enzo Fernandez.

Others have more legitimate reasons to buy: just to replace. City will, if Gundogan goes. West Ham must look for a future beyond Rice and, as the reality is they will not recruit someone of his calibre, that may entail bringing in two midfielders. In turn, that can keep money swirling around, powering the merry-go-round. Some of the available players may find themselves in limbo for a while due to the excellence of others: those stuck on shortlists below Rice or Gundogan or Maddison or Lavia or Mount may have to wait to see where they go and when and what that means. The sheer number of compelling options available could make it a buyer’s market, even if some sizeable fees are inevitable. Some of the more astute recruiters seem to have done fine business early, in Tielemans, Mac Allister and Bellingham. Some European clubs may delay to pick up bargains at the end of the summer.

The guarantee is there will be plenty more moves. Because by the time the window closes, virtually every midfield is likely to look different, some completely. After a Champions League final decided by a midfielder, this could be the summer of many midfielders.

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BACK TO TOP ʌ

WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2023

Sport/ Football

The lesson learnt as bidding for Man Utd enters final lap

Qataris are confident they will prevail in high-stakes ‘game’

MANCHESTER UNITED
UNITED TRINITY

There remains a belief within the club itself that the Glazers’ preference is to just raise enough investment to redevelop Old Trafford but retain control (Getty)

MIGUEL DELANEY

CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER

Takeover broker Raine has continued talks with all bidders for Manchester United this week, as the prospective sale of the club enters its protracted final stages. Buyers have been reluctant to give a timescale on when they expect the process to be completed, as so many superficial deadlines have already passed.

While most of the focus has been on Sir Jim Ratcliffe and Qatar's Sheikh Jassim-fronted bid, those bidding for a minority are still in the race. Most notably, no party currently sees themselves as out of it, even though the general feeling has been we are approaching the time when the Glazers are moving to "complete".

This confidence is most conspicuous in Qatar, given their camp didn't have that feeling two weeks ago. There was a widespread belief they were out of the race. The so-called "final take-it-or-leave-it" offer changed some thinking, and improved discussion. It is understood that bid is still of a lower overall value than that of Ineos, but the very fact that Qatar upped it at all is viewed as a strategic success for the Glazers.

The involvement of Paris Saint-Germain's Nasser Al Kehlaifi is also instructive, as it displays the Glazers' intent to get Qatar to up the price.

There is a view within industry circles that the United owners have long seen Ratcliffe as a "stalking horse" and that, if they are to actually sell, the intention has been to just gradually move Qatar up to the £6bn valuation. While Ratcliffe has made his valuation clear and can't really go past a certain point, after all, the Glazers are naturally conscious of Qatar's ultimately limitless wealth. It has ensured the process has become "a game", in the words of many sources.

There remains confidence in the Jim Ratcliffe camp about their bid (PA)

It is also why Qatar increasing their offer after the supposed last deadline is seen as a minor strategic victory for the Glazers. At the same time, there remains optimism within the Ineos camp, especially given the range of potential options they are giving the family. Avram and Joel Glazer, who are most attached to the club, could yet stay on.

Industry insiders and sources connected to the situation put Monday night's flare-up down to Qatari media reports of online speculation.

Chris Davidson, an academic expert on the Gulf who is a fellow at Durham University, believes the entire Qatar bid is a highly calibrated approach that has been influenced by the purchase of Harrods in 2010. Now owned by the Qatar Investment Authority, the flagship department store was sold to Qatar Holdings for a reported £1.5bn. Sheikh Jassim's father, the then Qatari prime minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, actually flew to London to finalise the deal with Mohammed Al Fayed.

The senior Jassim said at the time that Harrods would add "much value" to Qatar's portfolio of investments, especially as a "historical place", although Davidson points out how the state was derided for overpaying at the time. He believes this has influenced the United takeover process in two ways, both related to the image of the state.

One is over the symbolism of the price. The second is over the idea of giving the impression of some separation, to put more searching questions at a distance. “They’re just calibrating their bid,” Davidson told *The Independent*. “They could blow anyone out of the water, but they’re calibrated to always be just a little bit around Ratcliffe.

> **Qatar has faced huge criticism from groups such as Amnesty and FairSquare, with that debate framing the entire 2022 World Cup**

“It’s a very different approach. I think this is an example of Qatar learning a lesson they found out the hard way on Harrods, where they were repeatedly pilloried for having overpaid. They really wanted Harrods. It’s a particularly glamorous brand for people from the Gulf. The status it has given them among their Gulf rivals – not so much in the UK – is enormous. They were willing to overpay for that. I’m sure they’d be willing to overpay for Man United, too, but I think this was a case of having learnt their lesson.”

This then plays into another strategic purpose, which is putting a perceived difference between the bid and the state. It is all the more important given the greater focus on state ownership in sport, especially with Manchester City’s landmark treble victory and Saudi Arabia’s recent escalation in its sporting investments. One of the points that has been made about the Ratcliffe offer is that it would be much quicker and cleaner to do, as there would be no resistance from other clubs, nor human rights-related issues. The Premier League in March updated its Owners and Directors Test to include a new provision based on Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations in 2020. Qatar has faced huge criticism from groups such as Amnesty and FairSquare, with that debate framing the entire 2022 World Cup.

“By calibrating it, it just allows them to hover under the radar of being so obviously a state-backed entity, “ Davidson explains. “If they said, ‘right, we want it’ just as they did with Harrods, and did a bid that blew everyone out of the water, it would be pilloried for being an uncompetitive offer that reflects badly on Qatar. It’s an ongoing calibration as far as I can see… enough to win the bid without attracting too much negative attention or too much attention, it is ultimately state wealth.

“If they calibrate their offer, one of the talking points becomes that it essentially can’t be state backing. Otherwise, they’d throw even more of it. It’s clearly a stalking point bidding process.”

Ineos is optimistic that this is not the case and that it has a real chance. Much will depend on how greatly the Glazers actually want to sell, which has remained a huge question throughout all of this.

Qatar have been careful to separate the Man Utd takeover bid from the state (AP)

There remains a belief within the club itself that the Glazers’ preference is to just raise enough investment to redevelop Old Trafford but retain control. It is the poor state of the ground that has actually brought them to this point, after all, as it has started to affect revenue. Many in United's hierarchy have taken note of just how impressive the new Tottenham Hotspur Stadium is, and what a revenue machine it is for the London club. The current Old Trafford can't offer that, and it was symbolic that it has been passed over for the Euro 2028 plans.

That awareness runs alongside a persistent belief at the top of the game that elite clubs will see their value greatly rise in the years to come, particularly with the evolution of telecommunications and virtual reality technology. One industry source says that the new Chelsea owners were so keen to invest in the club – even for the much-pilloried £600m last season – because they believe they have bought an asset that could soon be worth £9bn for £2.5bn.

The Glazers are conscious of this, too. While there had previously been a belief that the market for clubs had bottomed out, and that a sale now could offer a remarkable sum for each of the six siblings, there is also the view that this could just be a bad time to sell. They may miss out on huge future earnings. While this has been discussed among the Glazers, nobody really knows what they are thinking. That is especially true of the bidders now, since multiple sources maintain "you never know where you are in the race".

All of this will only become apparent whenever it ends, which is right now as much of an unknown. The hope is that it's this week but that's been said before, through multiple weeks.

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BACK TO TOP ^

From sirens and bomb shelters to NBA glory

How Nikola Jokic jumped through hoops to realise his dream

Denver Nuggets centre Jokic and his wife Natalija with the Larry O'Brien NBA Championship Trophy and MVP award (AP)

BILLAL RAHMAN

Nikola Jokic completed one of the most improbable journeys in NBA history after guiding the Denver Nuggets past the Miami

Heat 94-89 in a thrilling victory, securing a gritty series win and a first-ever championship. The Serb was named Finals MVP, joining New York Knicks legend Willis Reed as the only other second-round pick to win the award. Jokic averaged 30 points, 13.5 rebounds and 9.5 assists in 20 games in the 2023 playoffs.

He is now one of 11 players who have secured two regular-season MVPs and at least one Finals MVP, joining legends such as Michael Jordon, Tim Duncan, Stephen Curry, Giannis Antetokounmpo, Moses Malone, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, LeBron James, Wilt Chamberlain and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Denver went 16-4 during its playoff run, and Jokic led the playoffs in all points, rebounds and assists. No player in NBA history has ever achieved this during the playoffs. Jokic is unique. “It puts him in the legendary category for what he’s done statistically in the Finals,” Isiah Thomas, the former Detroit Pistons star, told ESPN. “I don’t know if there’s anyone who’s ever had a statistical run in the NBA Finals as a centre as he had in these categories.”

Nikola Jokic celebrates winning the NBA championship and Finals MVP with the Denver Nuggets (Getty)

“The job is done and we can go home now,” said an earnest Jokic.

Having grown up in a cramped two-bedroom apartment that he shared with his parents, two brothers and grandmother in northern Serbia, his basketball abilities were honed playing with his two older brothers, Strahinja and Nemanja. His father worked as an agricultural engineer to help provide for the family.

When he was four years old, Nato troops bombed Serbia for 11 weeks in 1999 at the tail end of a war between Yugoslavia's six neighbouring states: Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. "I remember things like sirens, bomb shelters, always turning off the lights," Jokic recalled in 2017 in a conversation with *Bleacher Report*. "We practically lived in the dark. Even at like 9am, everything was turned off."

Jokic left home when he was just 16 to play with Mega Leks, a Serb basketball team in the Adriatic League. By his third year, he was named league MVP, a sign of things to come. Nicknamed "the Joker", Jokic was selected by the Nuggets with the 41st pick in the second round of the 2014 NBA draft. His moment was slightly overshadowed when his name was called during a Taco Bell commercial, and the 6ft 11in star opted to remain in Eastern Europe for an extra season and finally arrived in Denver in 2015.

Competing with Miami Heat centre Bam Adebayo during the NBA Finals (AP)

During the draft, Jokic was fast asleep in Serbia when he received a call in the middle of the night from his older brother, Nemanja. Nemanja informed his younger brother that he had been drafted into the NBA while popping a bottle of champagne. Jokic came into the league without draft pedigree. He was never supposed to be where he is today. Now he is arguably the best player in the NBA.

The future Hall of Famer redefines modern-day positionless basketball as his unconventional playmaking and slick scoring blur the lines between a point guard quarterbacking the offence and a high-scoring big man. The NBA champion has proven to be unstoppable in the pick-and-roll. He bends defences with his smooth passing and soft touch around the basket. His man-to-man defence is unconventional, slow and ugly but it still gets the job done.

Throughout his historic trip to the NBA finals, Jokic has surprassed Wilt Chamberlain for the most triple-doubles in a single playoff run. The two-time MVP also won the championship without a single all-star teammate. The Joker has etched his name in history with his dominating playoff run, but he couldn't have done it without his co-star Jamal Murray.

Celebrating after his team won the NBA Championship (AP)

Murray has averaged 26.1 points, 7.1 assists and 5.7 rebounds in 20 games in the 2023 playoffs. The Nuggets also put together a strong supporting cast of roleplayers that were tailor-made to play with the dynamic duo. The supporting cast, headlined by Aaron Gordon, included Michael Porter Jr, Bruce Bowen and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope to help propel the team into a championship calibre squad. The group has a chance to repeat as champs next year if they remain focused and don't suffer from complacency.

The entire team orbits around their all-time great player as Jokic has revolutionised basketball with his offensive prowess, changing the way teams gameplan around one player. He is cut from the same cloth as Michael Jordan, LeBron James and Stephen Curry, as opposing teams create a game plan around stopping him. In the 2020 Orlando bubble, after the Denver Nuggets lost to LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers in the Western Conference Finals, it was clear that the Nuggets had the blueprint to be a championship contender. After empathically sweeping the Lakers in this year's conference finals, the team realised their full potential and came out on top.

The NBA title ought to solidify Jokic's status as the best player in the NBA. Despite winning two regular-season MVPs, critics doubted if he could anchor a championship-level defence, and now he has silenced all who dismissed him.

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BACK TO TOP ^

Sport news in brief

Rory McIlroy speaking at the Canadian Open (AP)

McIlroy skips US Open media duty and golf merger questions

Days after describing his press conference before the Canadian Open as the “most uncomfortable” he has felt for a year, Rory McIlroy made sure to avoid a similar situation at the US Open. McIlroy was due to speak to the media at 9am local time yesterday at Los Angeles Country Club, but informed tournament officials on Sunday he wished to cancel. The four-time major winner is also currently not scheduled to speak today ahead of the year’s third major championship, which he won at Congressional in 2011.

Speaking ahead of his title defence in the Canadian Open, McIlroy admitted he still “hated” LIV Golf as he responded to the news that the PGA Tour and DP World Tour were merging their commercial operations with the golf-related businesses of Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), which bankrolls LIV. The Northern Irishman, whose previously close friendship with Sergio Garcia broke down after the Spaniard joined LIV, said: “It’s hard for me to not sit up here and feel somewhat like a sacrificial lamb and feeling like I’ve put myself out there and this is what happens.” Asked following his opening round if he felt more pressure on the golf course or off it, McIlroy said: “Off. You know, the most uncomfortable I’ve felt in the last 12 months was my press conference yesterday.”

McIlroy will partner another LIV player and US PGA Championship winner Brooks Koepka in the first two rounds in Los Angeles, along with former Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama. *PA*

Stokes played key role in Moeen ending retirement for Ashes

Moeen Ali admits there is only one captain and one series that would have tempted him to overturn his Test retirement. Moeen won the last of his 64 England caps almost two years ago and was content with his decision to step away from a format that has exacted a physical and psychological toll on him over the years. But things all changed when England’s first-choice spinner Jack Leach was unexpectedly ruled out for the summer. England skipper Ben Stokes, who spent the best part of two months with Moeen during their time together at Chennai Super Kings in this year’s Indian Premier League, set the wheels in motion for a comeback and little more than a week later Moeen was sitting in his new England whites taking questions at his home ground of Edgbaston.

Asked if there was any other captain he would have returned for, he said: “Probably not, no. “I’ve obviously spent a lot of time with Stokesy in India… he didn’t mention anything about coming out of retirement, it was just about the Ashes and how he was looking to take the team. But he obviously watched me train out there and thinks I can bowl decently."

As for his motivation for one last crack at an Australia side who have provided him with some of the most challenging moments in international cricket, Moeen was keener to focus on the draw of being back involved in one of his sport's marquee rivalries. "It's such a big series… it's the Ashes, to be part of it would be amazing. It is a free hit. I'm not playing for my spot. There's no pressure, really. All the things I ever wanted to do in Test cricket I'm going to try to do in these games." *PA*

Mbappe breaks silence after speculation over PSG exit

Kylian Mbappe has responded angrily to claims that he will be leaving Paris Saint-Germain for Real Madrid this summer as speculation about his future heats up. Mbappe will not take up the option of a one-year extension in his contract at PSG when it expires next June, according to reports from *L'Equipe*, with the France forward adding that the club had been notified of his decision last year.

Mbappe, a World Cup winner with France in 2018, confirmed his decision in a letter to the club and could even be sold this summer as PSG will seek to avoid losing him for free, according to the report. The forward would be free to negotiate and sign a pre-contract agreement with a new club from January should he decide to see out the remaining year of his deal at PSG, as he appears to want to do.

In a statement sent to news agency AFP yesterday, Mbappe said PSG "were informed on July 15, 2022" of his decision to not extend his contract, adding that "the only aim of the letter was to confirm what had already been spoken about previously". The 24-year-old then took to social media to refute a report from French newspaper *Le Parisien* that claimed he wants to join Real Madrid this summer. Quote-tweeting the report on Twitter, Mbappe wrote: "LIES… At the same time, the bigger it is, the more it passes. I have already said that I will continue next season at PSG where I am very happy." PSG have not responded to a request for comment. *Reuters*

Wolff gives update on Hamilton's new Mercedes contract

Lewis Hamilton's F1 future could be resolved as early as before this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix. The British driver has six months to run on his £40m-a-season deal with Mercedes, but team principal Toto Wolff said his superstar driver is on the brink of agreeing new terms. "It is going to happen soon, and we are talking more days than weeks," Wolff told CNBC's *Squawk on the Street* programme in New York, when asked about Hamilton's contract negotiations. "We are trying hard [to get it done before the Canadian Grand Prix]. I will see him today and maybe we will talk about it. We have such a good relationship that we dread the moment that we need to talk about money."

Hamilton, 38, met with Wolff the day after the last round in Spain in the hope of rubber-stamping a fresh contract with the Silver Arrows. It is anticipated that the British driver's extension will be a multi-year deal, extending his stay in F1 beyond his 40th birthday. "From a team's perspective, Lewis and Mercedes have gone back a long time," added Wolff. "He has never raced for any other brand than Mercedes. We both joined the team in 2013 together and from a professional relationship, we now have a friendship. It has been a wonderful time."

Hamilton, who has not won a race since his contentious championship defeat to Max Verstappen at the 2021 season finale in Abu Dhabi, is already 83 points off the title pace this year. But Mercedes' recent upturn in form has provided Hamilton, who finished runner-up to Red Bull's Verstappen at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya, with renewed hope that his dream of a record eighth world title is not over. *PA*

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BACK TO TOP ^